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A MOMENT HE STOOD THERE, AMID A DEATHLIKE SILENCE, AND THEN CAST AN
APPEALING LOOK TOWARD THE SON OF LAFITTE.

OR,

The Golden Wings of the Gulf.

A Romance of Buccaneers after the
War of 1812, and Companion Story
to "Lafitte's Legacy."

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "THE ROYAL MIDDY," "THE SEA
RAIDER," "THE FLYING YANKEE," "MERLE
THE MIDDY," "THE INDIAN PILOT,"
"THE WILD YACHTSMAN," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

FOR AND AGAINST.

"The young buccaneer should hang."

"I say the same."

"Let us investigate further, gentlemen, into
his case," said a third speaker of a group of

half a dozen gentlemen who sat in council in the Government quarters in New Orleans, a few months after the battle of the 8th of January, which beat back the British advance upon the Crescent City.

Those who were gathered together were in deep consultation upon a most important matter, and they were the "committeemen" who then ruled over the destinies of the city and its surroundings.

The subject under discussion was the fact that one, Leo Lafitte, son of Lafitte the Pirate of the Gulf, had brought into port a British brig-of-war as a prize.

Lafitte and a number of his men had been pardoned by the President, under recommendation of General Jackson and Governor Claiborne, on account of gallant services rendered in the defense of New Orleans, when he had come to the aid of the Americans, after refusing a most generous offer from the British to ally himself with them.

At that time Lafitte's power was great in the Gulf of Mexico, and he had under his command a number of vessels which did great damage upon the sea to the shipping of all lands.

After his services to the Americans, his stronghold on the coast had been destroyed by a United States fleet, and but Lafitte's own vessel, and that of one of his captains had escaped.

The latter had kept up his piracies, while Lafitte, in hope of pardon, and lying wounded at a convent in New Orleans, had escaped to sea when he heard that the "City Fathers," or committeemen, wanted him hanged, in spite of his services.

He had determined to run down his former captain, Ricardo, as an earnest of his sincerity, and hoped that would prove his good faith to give up piracy; but his vessel had met the British brig Vulture, which, greatly his superior, had sunk the pirate schooner, for Lafitte would not haul down his flag.

His young son, Leo, and his slave, Coola, had escaped, by swimming to the shore, and after numerous adventures, the young outlaw had gotten possession of a new vessel, which had just been built for the pirate fleet, and in it had sought to avenge his father's death.

He had, in this vessel, captured the British brig Vulture, and carried her into New Orleans, surrendering her as a prize to the authorities, and asking for a commission to run down Ricardo.

The surrender of the brig had been made to Governor Claiborne, who had proven the stanch friend of the youth, and he had placed the matter before the committee, to have it coldly received, for the name of Lafitte had so long been a terror in the Gulf, and his lawless acts had made their pursues suffer so that they were unfriendly to all concerned with him.

Thus it was that one of the members uttered the words that open this story.

"Gentlemen, I ask you only for justice for the youth," said Governor Claiborne, who was present as the advocate of Leo Lafitte.

"State your case, Governor Claiborne," said one.

"Well, gentlemen, you know that Lafitte, and those who fought here with him so bravely, were certainly pardoned, and this included his handsome son, Leo.

"Now, the youth came to me, after his father's death, and asked for a roving commission to run down Ricardo, and other pirates; but, of course, I could not give it to him.

"He departed, and in some way got a fine vessel, armed her and shipped a crew.

"The result was that he avenged his father's death, at the hands of the British commander of the brig-of-war Vulture, by capturing that vessel, with a craft, too, that was much smaller, and had a crew but half the size of her foe.

"This brig-of-war he has brought into port and surrendered, while he has again asked for authority to go pirate-hunting, and once more has been refused.

"Now, gentlemen I leave the case for you to decide upon its merits."

"He is a pirate beyond doubt," said one.

"Yes, he is the son of Lafitte, and was born at sea, and raised upon his father's vessel."

"Which has done more damage to American shipping than all other pirates put together!" another of the committeemen remarked.

"True, and yet Lafitte refused gold, rank and pardon from the British, to fight for us with not even a pledge that he would not be hanged when the battle was over, and a certainty to hang if the English beat us.

"He did much for us, and he and his men are pardoned, and this youth therefore is no pirate, and asks simply a commission for his services

rendered, with every prospect of freeing the sea from the buccaneers," said the governor.

"He was not pardoned to put to sea again, and in doing so he has again placed upon himself the brand of pirate."

"But he captured the British brig-of-war."

"That does not palliate, in my view, and he did that as a rap for us, while he continued his piracies."

"I see, gentlemen, that I am the only friend of young Lafitte present, in spite of his services; but here comes Captain De La Tour, of our navy, and his views may be valuable."

As the governor spoke a man of fine presence entered, clad in the uniform of a captain in the navy.

He bowed in a courtly manner to those present and was greeted with marked respect, while the governor said.

"Captain De La Tour, we were just discussing the case of Lafitte, and seek your opinion."

"Lafitte!" and at the name the captain sprung to his feet while his face turned livid and every feature worked with intense emotion.

CHAPTER II.

ITS CATCHING BEFORE HANGING.

ALL present were surprised at the great emotion exhibited by Captain De La Tour, at the mere mention of the name of Lafitte, and he, seeing their looks of amazement at once became calm, and with remarkable coolness said:

"Lafitte, you spoke of Lafitte, governor?"

"Yes, Captain De La Tour," and all were as much surprised at the sudden change in the captain's manner as they had been at his emotion of a moment before.

"Yes, sir, we have under discussion Lafitte's son, Leo Lafitte."

"His son?"

"Yes, a youth of superb bearing, handsome face and brave as a lion."

"I knew not of his son," and the captain's thoughts seemed to revert to the past.

"Yes, the youth was his father's lieutenant, and received pardon with him, for services in the Battle of New Orleans.

"He put to sea with his father, for you know that Lafitte lay wounded at the convent, and learning that he was to be arrested and his vessel seized, set sail in his schooner."

"My dear governor, I have been absent on a cruise and knew only that Lafitte's wound was not fatal, as I had hoped, and that he had again gone to sea.

"I intend to run him down, for, outside of his piracies, there is a personal debt which I have to settle with him," and the officer's eyes flashed fire as he spoke, and all present felt that he had indeed some cause of quarrel with Lafitte, this accounting for his emotion previously shown.

"Pray tell me what you know of Lafitte, gentlemen," he asked, after a moment.

The governor made known all that the committee knew of Lafitte's going to sea, to escape being put in irons, his chase of one of his former captains, Ricardo, who had been treacherous to him, the meeting with the British brig-of-war Vulture and the sinking of the schooner Destiny with her chief on board, and who would not surrender to a foe double his strength.

"And you say that Lafitte is dead?" asked Captain De La Tour, evidently deeply moved.

"He is, sir."

"I cannot believe it."

"Still it is true."

"And your source of information, governor?"

"His son."

"Ah! this son!"

"Yes, he was with his father but escaped, with a negro slave, to the shore by swimming."

"Describe the boy, please, governor."

"He is tall, commanding in form, with broad shoulders and neat carriage."

"He is about twenty years of age, I should judge, and has a face that is strikingly handsome and attractive."

"He looks strangely like his father, and yet his eyes hold not the look of stern resolve, of bitterness, which Lafitte's had, but are pensive, rather, and very large and brilliant."

"Yes, he is the one I saw—he is her son."

The officer spoke aloud, but to himself, and, starting, as he thought his words might have betrayed him, he resumed:

"Is this boy in the city, governor?"

"He is, and we were, as I said, discussing him, for, after his escape from the schooner, he made his way here and reported his father's death to me, and asked for authority to hunt down Ricardo, and other Gulf buccaneers."

"I could not give it to him, and so he departed, and, it seems, got a vessel and crew, set

sail, captured the British brig-of-war Vulture, and—"

"What! that boy captured the Vulture?"

"Yes, Captain De La Tour."

"What with?"

"His schooner."

"Impossible!"

"The Vulture is a prize now in port as proof."

"Then he is indeed like his father; but pray continue, for your story is of deepest interest to me."

"He brought the Vulture here, and again asked authority to go on a cruise after pirates."

"And your answer?"

"A refusal, of course."

"And this young Lafitte?"

"Is now here."

"With his vessel?"

"No, he did not bring his vessel into port."

"Ah, he is wise for his years."

"And I have urged that he be allowed to go pirate-hunting, but my colleagues here refuse sanction."

"And justly, for the boy should hang," said the captain, almost savagely.

"But he has a pardon from the President."

"True, for his piracies prior to the battle here; but he has been again at sea, and with no authority, while he was with his father when he fled from port the night Lafitte was to be arrested."

"The boy should hang, gentlemen, or we will have the name of Lafitte again a terror upon the seas."

All seemed to be of this opinion, with the exception of the governor and one other, and they urged that the youth should be given a chance for his life by surrendering his vessel and giving such information as to the haunts of the pirates as would enable the cruisers to capture them.

This was the decision of the committee, and the governor volunteered to visit the young outcast and make known the decision.

If he refused, he was to be hanged for going to sea with his father after having been pardoned, and then cruising in an armed vessel under the black flag, for it was supposed that he had done so.

All waited in the council-rooms the return of the governor.

He returned, and his face bore a look of sadness.

"Gentlemen, we are too late, for young Lafitte has gone."

"Gone!" cried half a dozen voices.

"Yes, he has left the quarters where he was stopping, and the landlord said he had gone to sea, for so he said."

"I went where his men had been quartered, and they, too, were gone."

"Then I shall follow and run him down, for no Lafitte shall flaunt his flag over the seas as long as I have a deck beneath my feet."

"Gentlemen, I sail to-night, so bid you adieu," and the naval officer departed, a strange look upon his handsome, stern face, which contained both hatred and firm resolve.

CHAPTER III.

LEO LAFITTE.

A FEW hours prior to the meeting of the committeemen, who seemed to be so anxious to hang Leo Lafitte, a young man was pacing to and fro in a pleasant room, which, from indications, appeared to be his temporary quarters.

His face though youthful, for he could not be over twenty, were yet stamped with a character beyond his years.

Resolution, daring and intelligence marked his features, while there was an appearance about him of one who had seen much in his young life.

He was dressed in a sailor suit, that fitted his fine form well, and paced to and fro with the air of one who had learned the step on the quarter-deck of a vessel-of-war.

Now his face wore a clouded look, and in his hand he held a letter, which had caused him to be thus lost in deep, and perhaps painful thoughts.

"And this is their gratitude for what I have done?" he said, bitterly.

"Once a pirate, always a pirate, it seems."

"They accepted my father's services to defend them, and then, while he lay wounded, would have thrown him in irons and seized his vessel, pretending that he should be under guard while awaiting the coming of his pardon."

"But thanks to that beautiful nun, Sister Mercedes, I had warning, and we escaped to sea."

"Now, after I have captured, a British brig,

double the size of my vessel, and brought her into port as a prize, they refuse to allow me to go on a cruise after Ricardo, but intend to arrest me too, and perhaps hang me, for so says this letter from good Sister Mercedes."

Raising the letter he read aloud:

"I have it from the best of authority, Father Felix, who is the particular friend of the committee men, that you are to be arrested, and this is why I write you as I do."

"Father Felix urged against it, so I heard him tell a brother priest, and they would not be guided, but said that you should be put in irons, perhaps be hanged, that the name of Lafitte might perish from the seas."

"I feel that you are guiltless of all wrong in the matter."

"You were born upon the sea, reared on a pirate craft, and hardly knew right from wrong."

"Your father, though pardoned, was to be put in irons, you fled with him, and you have proved yourself a hero by capturing the British brig."

"You bring her in as a prize, and the gallows is held up before you as a reward."

"I beg you, therefore, to fly, for they are bitter here against the name of Lafitte."

"Fly, and win new laurels, to, in the end, command their admiration and full pardon."

"I write you thus, Leo, for the sake of your father, whom I knew in the long ago, and because I know you to be true as steel."

"You saved the life of that sweet girl, little Mademoiselle De La Tour, who, in thanks to the Virgin for her happy rescue by you, from the outlaws who had kidnapped her, changed her name to Felicite De La Tour, and your modest nature would not let it be known that you were the hero who had saved her from perhaps worse than death."

"I recognized you, though, and only my promise to you, sealed my lips, when her father sought to find out who it was that had been the rescuer of his child, his idol."

"Did he but know that it was the son of Lafitte?"

"What then?"

"Again you proved your noble nature by giving into my hands, when I asked it, the story of your father's life, with the seal unbroken, and which he had given you before his death, as a part of his legacy."

"But I must write no more, for I have no right to do so, and Heaven will forgive me the sin, when it is for the sake of another's good."

"If I should die, without again seeing you, in the hands of Father Felix, will be left a package addressed to you."

"It will be the confession of your father, returned to you, and mine, and then you shall know all; but, while I live, let the veil of secrecy rest upon his part and mine."

"Fly from here at once for the shadow of the gallows is upon you, as those narrow-minded men will seek to destroy you, because you are Lafitte's son."

"Farewell, Leo, and Heaven guide you, is the prayer of

"MERCEDES, THE NUN."

Having again read this letter, Leo destroyed it, and then said aloud:

"She is right, they will destroy me; so I will not remain to be hanged."

"They fear the name even of Lafitte, and angels' tears, it seems, can never blot out the crimes of my poor father—yes, and mine—for have I not been a pirate from infancy?"

"My beautiful schooner awaits me at the old ruined stronghold, the retreat of Lafitte's fleet, and I will get my men and go there this night."

"I will then set sail and hunt down that traitor, Ricardo, and perhaps when I have further proven my good faith, I may win the respect and position I crave."

"Had I not met that beautiful nun; had I not rescued that sweet little maiden, pretty Felicite De La Tour, I would have been bitter, for the conduct of those men would have begot bitterness and recklessness, and I would have still cruised the seas as a pirate."

"But the prayers of Mercedes the Nun have softened my heart, and the lovely face of little Felicite seems ever beside me, and I will try once more to win honor, and live like an honorable man."

"But now I must depart, or else it will be too late."

CHAPTER IV.

THE GOLDEN WINGS.

"THERE'S a sail in the offing, sir."

The words were spoken by a young officer, who had just come from the shore and boarded a schooner that lay at anchor in a small, landlocked harbor.

The scene was upon the coast of Louisiana, and in the harbor of the island now known as Lafitte's Island for it was, in the early days of the present century, the stronghold and retreat of that famous sea chief.

The island appeared to have suffered from the visit of a foe, for the two forts, one on the ridge, the other guarding the entrance to the harbor,

had both been destroyed, and the guns were tumbled down the hillside and spiked.

Then there were the charred remains of a number of cabins, and desolation rested upon all.

The harbor was a safe one, and the schooner referred to was one of two vessels at anchor there, the other being a sloop, evidently a coasting craft.

The large schooner, which the officer had boarded, had her topmasts housed as though not caring to have them show above the tree-tops, and be seen by a vessel passing outside.

The craft was a most beautiful model, from her razor-like bows to her narrow stern, and her rig was the perfection of graceful lines.

Every sail was neatly furled and the schooner seemed to be new and in splendid trim.

A few men only were upon her decks, the balance being camped out ashore upon the sloping, natural lawn that ran down to the sandy beach.

For a vessel of her tonnage, which was about two hundred tons, the schooner carried a very heavy battery, and all of them were splendid guns of large caliber, while her sail area, judging from the length of her spars, was simply enormous.

The bulwarks were high and very massive, which would afford a good breastwork against small-arms in action, and, from the sharp point of her bowsprit to the end of her mainboom, from the keel to the truck, there seemed to be nothing wanting to make her a perfect vessel.

No flag floated over her decks, but the officer addressed and the one who boarded were both dressed in uniform, though one not known to any of the navies of the world.

The senior officer was a handsome young man of twenty-five, with a devil-may-care look in his eyes, and the appearance of one who had been born a gentleman.

The other was a man of short stature, with a resolute, fearless face, and looked the thorough seaman that he was.

Upon the caps of each officer was a pair of golden wings, and the men's skull-caps of scarlet also had the same design upon them.

"What kind of a craft is it, Lomax?" asked the senior officer, in response to the report of the one who came aboard.

"A small schooner, which I supposed might be Captain Lafitte's, though we did not expect him so soon, and I had not my glass to make her out with."

"Then we have nothing to fear if she is a small craft."

"I will take my glass and go to the cliff for a look at the stranger," and Lieutenant Lester, first officer of the armed schooner Golden Wings, went ashore.

Ascending to the ruins of the old fort which had commanded the entrance to the harbor, he beheld a vessel about a league distant from the island.

It was a small schooner, coaster build, and was heading in toward the harbor.

Leveling his glass he said:

"Yes, it is Captain Lafitte, for besides recognizing the schooner I sent after him, on my arrival here, I see the Golden Wings flag with its red field."

"Still I must be cautious, as if harm has befallen our gallant young captain, this may be some trick to capture the Golden Wings."

So saying he retraced his way down the hill and going to the camp ordered the men on board the schooner, which at once got up anchor, set sail, and stood across the harbor on a tack that would enable her broadside to command the entrance to the haven.

A moment more and the strange sail appeared in sight, running into the harbor, and at once there went up to the peak of the armed craft a large crimson flag, in the center of which was a pair of Golden Wings, spread.

Then Lieutenant Lester sent up signals which read:

"Prove who you are, or I fire a broadside into you."

"Lester is on the alert, I am glad to see," said a young man in sailor garb, who stood upon the deck of the little schooner.

"Signal him, Carona, that I am on board and all is right, for we don't wish to get one of the Golden Wings' broadside."

The speaker was he who had been seen pacing the room in his quarters at New Orleans, and whose warning of danger, sent by Mercedes the Nun, had caused him to leave the town the same night.

The signal was given and the Golden Wings stood back to her anchorage, while the little schooner came boldly into the harbor and dropped anchor not far away.

A boat from the Golden Wings met her, as

she let fall her anchor, and Leo Lafitte entering it soon stood upon the deck of his beautiful vessel.

"I am glad to see you cautious, Senior Lester," he said, as he grasped the hand of his lieutenant.

"I was not sure, sir, that you might not have been held, and a large force be on the schooner to run us aboard and capture us."

"You are right, Lester; but though I got away, had I remained they would have hanged me perhaps," and the young man spoke bitterly.

"After the capture of the Vulture?"

"Oh, yes, for they wish to sacrifice some one bearing the name of Lafitte, to satiate their greed against pirates in general."

"And the Vulture?"

"I left her there as their prize, got my men on board the schooner, as soon as it was dark and set sail."

"And now, sir?"

"We have but one course to pursue, Lester, if we wish to command respect and pardon."

"Yes, sir, and that course?"

"Is to hunt down Ricardo the Rover, who I learn is making himself a terror upon the Gulf."

"It would be a good thing to capture him, if only for his treachery to your father."

"Ricardo was always the foe of my father, Lester, though he appeared his friend."

"It was from something that happened years ago, but just what I do not know."

"He came to my father, with his vessel, and asked to become one of Lafitte's League, and trusting him, my father took him in as one of the fleet captains, and he rose to be next in command to the chief."

"When we went to New Orleans, to fight for the Americans, Ricardo was left in command here, and it is said, got drunk and was thus surprised by the American fleet, who ruined all, as you know."

"Certain it is that the stronghold was taken, with all the fleet, excepting Ricardo's schooner, for he escaped in her, and this vessel, which you had gone after up to Baltimore."

"Ricardo hoisted his own flag and is cruising as a pirate, and it was while pursuing him my father lost his life, as we ran upon the Vulture."

"Captain Dick, who was the pilot of the American fleet, and my father's foe, I killed as you know, and the Vulture, who sunk him, I captured, making two blows to avenge Lafitte."

"A third will be the running down of Ricardo, and upon that duty we sail at once, leaving the little schooner and sloop here with half a dozen men on board."

"Now get the Golden Wings ready for sea, Senior Lester."

The lieutenant left the cabin, and as the sun sunk that day, the island was left astern of the Golden Wings, which was bound upon the hunt for Ricardo the Rover of the Gulf.

CHAPTER V.

FELICITE.

It was the evening of the meeting of the committeemen in New Orleans, and soon after the return of the governor to report that Leo Lafitte was gone, and therefore had to be caught before he was hanged.

The naval officer, Captain De La Tour, had decided, as is known, to go at once to sea in chase of Leo Lafitte, who he seemed to feel assured would hoist his black flag and turn pirate once more.

He believed that he could capture him, and, as the schooner of the young outlaw had not been brought up to the city, she must therefore be in hiding near the Delta upon the coast.

And where would there be a better place than the old retreat of Lafitte?

So there at once would he go in pursuit.

But before Captain De La Tour departed from port, he had a duty of love to perform.

That was to visit his daughter at the convent where she was receiving her education.

So up to the convent he drove, and ringing the gate bell asked to see Mademoiselle Felicite La Tour.

He was ushered into the parlor, and soon there tripped into the room a perfect fairy of girlish loveliness.

She was scarcely more than fifteen, and yet her form was grace itself, and her large, liquid blue eyes seemed to be wells in which slumbered most ardent love.

A wealth of golden hair hung about her shoulders, and she was certainly a most beautiful child, just upon the threshold of womanhood.

"Oh papa! how glad I am to see you."

"It was so good of you to come," she said, speaking in French, for Captain De La Tour be-

longed to an old French noble family, his father having settled upon the coast as a planter two-score years before.

The mother of Felicite, as she had been renamed, had died leaving to her husband the infant daughter to care for, and the father's heart had been wrapped up in his child.

A man of vast wealth, he possessed a handsome home upon the coast; but could not enjoy it until his daughter had left school, so he continued his services in the navy, as captain of a brig-of-war, which he had named *Nemesis*.

"I am come, my child, to say good-by, for I start upon another cruise to-night," said Captain De La Tour, seating himself upon the sofa and drawing Felicite down beside him.

"So soon, papa?"

"Duty calls me."

"But you have only just returned."

"True, but must be off again; but tell me, have you heard aught more of your gallant young rescuer?"

"No, papa."

"You have tried?"

"Yes, sir, and Father Felix, and Sister Mercedes have also tried to find out who the brave youth was, who rescued me from those fearful men."

"But it seems that they cannot, and I feel so sorry about it."

"Doubtless some rich young Creole planter who feared he might be insulted by offering a reward."

"No papa, he was no planter, I am sure, though he was a gentleman."

"He was dressed as a sailor, and, as well as I could see in the darkness, so very handsome."

"Then he was coming up the river, as I told you, in a small sloop, and had overheard the men on the schooner at anchor speak of their captain being up the river to kidnap a girl."

"He saw the boat coming, hailed them by the name he had overheard, and then came alongside and he rescued me."

"When he brought me to the convent here, I threw myself into dear good Sister Mercedes's arms, and the youth departed, unthanked and unseen."

"It is strange; but I would give much to find him, for I would reward him most liberally."

"Papa, he is not one to offer gold to, I am sure, for he was a gentleman."

"Well, try and find out who he is before my return; but now tell me why I can never see this beautiful nun, Sister Mercedes, whom you seem to love so dearly?"

"I do not know, papa; but she always makes an excuse not to see you," said Felicite, thoughtfully.

"And sees others?"

"Every one, sir."

"This is strange; but will you go now and ask her to see me, for I wish to give into her hands a sum of gold for charity, and also to have a talk with her about you, my child."

Felicite disappeared, but soon returned and said that Sister Mercedes was not well and asked to be excused, but that Sister Salome would see Captain De La Tour.

"Papa," added Felicite, "Sister Mercedes really seems determined to avoid you, I am sure."

"Do you know her, sir?"

"I have never seen her in my life, to my knowledge," was the reply.

"Well, papa, it is strange, but I am sure she knows you."

Captain De La Tour seemed annoyed at this, but made no other reply upon the subject just then, and rose as Sister Salome entered.

"I am sorry I could not see Sister Mercedes, as my daughter seems to be under her keeping," he said to Sister Salome, who replied:

"Sister Mercedes has a headache, monsieur, so bade me represent her."

"Is she a native of New Orleans, may I ask?"

"I know not, monsieur."

"Could I inquire her name before she took the veil?"

"I believe it is not known to any one here, monsieur."

"I ask, as I think I must have met her at some time in my life."

And Captain De La Tour bit his lips, vexed at his want of success in seeing Sister Mercedes, or finding out who it was that had rescued his daughter from her kidnappers.

Soon after he took his leave, and Felicite asked:

"Where are you going on this cruise, papa?"

"To hunt down the son of Lafitte, the Pirate of the Gulf, that he may not stain the sea with blood, as his father did," was the response, and the voice showed suppressed emotion, which did

not escape the ear of Felicite, who said to the good nun:

"Sister Salome, I thought Lafitte and his men had been pardoned for their bravery in the battle here?"

"So they were, my child; but Lafitte is dead, and it is thought that his son will again turn pirate, and so your father seeks to capture him."

"I hope he won't catch him, for from what Sister Mercedes told me of this young Lafitte, who came here often to see his wounded father, I do not believe he is wicked at heart, or will again sail under the pirate flag."

And with this boldly-expressed opinion, Felicite sought Sister Mercedes, to try and find out if she had ever known her father.

But in this she was unsuccessful.

CHAPTER VI.

A PIRATE'S MUSINGS.

A GRIM, cruel-faced man sat in the cabin of a heavily-armed schooner that was gliding over the waters of the Gulf of Mexico one afternoon some months after the sailing of the *Golden Wings* from the ruined island retreat of the *Buccaneers of Barrataria*.

The craft was a stanch one, and yet graceful withal, sailed with great ease and speed, and had a very heavy armament for a vessel of her tonnage.

Fully a hundred men were visible upon her decks, and a hard-looking set of humanity they were.

There were Portuguese, Spanish, Cuban, Mexicans, French, English and negroes, and the faces of all were indelibly stamped with the lines of crime they had led, for they were pirates, and of the worst cut-throat order.

But they looked like good sailors and splendid fighters, and that was their only virtue, and a virtue in a bad cause, for the vessel was the *Firebug*, the pirate schooner of Ricardo.

Ricardo the Rover was the stern, cruel-faced man seated in the cabin.

He had been, as has been stated, the senior captain in Lafitte's flotilla, but had fled from the island, where he held command, when it was attacked by the Americans, and had raised his own flag over his vessel, a skeleton form in a black field.

His nature knew no mercy, gold was his god, and so he began his wild life of crime upon the seas.

He wished not hard knocks, but took them bravely if dealt, and sought only to prey upon merchantmen.

Now and then he "caught a Tartar," but his crew fought like demons and had often beaten off a cruiser much stronger than was the schooner in guns and men.

He had seen Lafitte's schooner sunk by the *Vulture* brig-of-war, while he was far off upon the sea, and had admired the pluck of his chief for dying at his guns and going down with his colors flying, though feeling glad that he had his revenge in witnessing the destruction of the noted corsair commodore.

"I had never forgiven him for taking the fair *Senorita Mateo* from me when I held her captive, and now I have my revenge in seeing him die; but it would have been sweeter had he perished at the yard-arm."

So he had said, when, by the flashes of the guns, he had seen Lafitte's schooner go down.

Then he had run away from the scene with all speed, and soon Ricardo the Rover became feared upon the Gulf and its shores for his merciless cruelty to all.

So it was months after, that the dreaded pirate was cruising along that pleasant afternoon, while the lookouts kept bright watch for the glance of a sail.

And, in the midst of his booty, for the cabin was half-full of piratical treasure, Ricardo sat alone, smoking a pipe, a decanter of brandy on one hand and a silver goblet in his grasp.

And Ricardo was doing something which he seldom allowed himself to do—that is, he was communing with the past.

It might have been the rare old liquor that mellowed his thoughts; but he certainly was thinking of a fair maiden who had once been his captive.

He had stolen her from her home on the coast of Jamaica, when her father, Don Marco Mateo, a wealthy Spanish exile lived in his sumptuous villa, with his beautiful daughter and his servants.

He could have gotten a large ransom for her, he well knew; but her beauty had won his love, such as he could feel, and he was in hopes of winning her as his wife.

But, lo! a vessel had loomed in sight, and it

proved to be a small schooner commanded by Lafitte, then a young man, for Ricardo was musing of a time twenty odd years before.

That vessel, commanded by Lafitte, had run down near him and the two captains had recognized each other.

Lafitte had been a slaver captain, a year or so before, and Ricardo had been his first officer.

Then Lafitte had given up the trade of a slaver, because it was brutal, and taken to piracy which was cruel, and Ricardo had been made captain in his stead.

But Ricardo had turned the slaver schooner into a buccaneer, and began to rove the Gulf.

Then they had, the former captain and his lieutenant, met at sea, in command of a pirate schooner.

Lafitte had gone on board the schooner of his old officer, to make him a visit, when out of the cabin glided the fair captive of Ricardo, the *Senorita Juquita Mateo*, and, throwing herself at the feet of the stranger, had appealed to him for protection.

It had been frankly given and Lafitte was proud to disarm Ricardo upon his own deck and then spring into the sea with the fair captive.

His boat had picked him up, he had gained his own deck, and a duel had followed, in which Lafitte beat Ricardo off.

The captive had been wounded, but Lafitte had tenderly cared for her, and then taken her to her home on the coast of Jamaica.

Pretending to be in the Mexican Navy, Lafitte had won the love of the fair young *Spaniard*, who was pledged to an American naval captain, and, denounced by her lover, as a pirate, the daring chief had, sheltered by *Juquita*, beaten back his foes and gained his vessel.

Juquita Mateo had loved Lafitte too devotedly to give him up, and so had become a pirate's bride, and she it was who had been the mother of Leo, dying in giving him birth.

Long years after Ricardo had joined the fleet of the famous sea chief, who had risen to the position of a pirate admiral.

But Ricardo had never forgotten nor forgiven the taking of *Juquita Mateo* from him by Lafitte, and hence was glad to see him go down into the Gulf, sunk by the guns of the *Vulture*.

Such were the thoughts that went through the brain of Ricardo, as he sat in his cabin that pleasant afternoon, musing over the past.

For over a score of years he had been a pirate, and, though he had vast treasures laid by, his greedy soul longed for more, and he meant to struggle on yet awhile in his life of crime to add more riches to his treasures.

"Another year and I will leave the sea and enjoy my riches," muttered the crime-stained man.

"Strange that Lafitte never gave up his life of piracy, for he must have possessed vast wealth."

"But he has gone, and with him sunk his son, and her son, for he was the child of *Senorita Mateo*."

"Well, I have the field to myself now, for I fear none of the smaller pirates, and another year should make me rich, yes, very rich."

"Then I will quit and live the life of luxury I have longed for."

"I will—"

"Sail ho!"

The cry of the lookout reached Ricardo in his cabin, and stopped his musings, for soon after an officer appeared to report that a schooner-of-war, evidently an American cruiser, was standing out from an inlet, a league and a half away and crowding on all sail in chase.

"We want gold and silver, *Senor Midas*, not iron and steel, so crowd on all sail and run for it," was the reply of Ricardo, who again settled down to his musing.

But only for a few moments, for he was again interrupted by the officer, who reported:

"The vessel is gaining rapidly, Captain Ricardo."

"Have you full sail, sir?"

"All that she can stand, sir."

"And she still gains?"

"Rapidly!"

"Ha! this won't do, *Midas*, for no cruiser should be able to catch us."

"I will come on deck."

But if Ricardo felt that his going on deck would help matters, he was mistaken, for the schooner still gained.

CHAPTER VII.

A TIRELESS PURSUER.

THE sail sighted from the deck of Ricardo's vessel, the *Firebug*, proved to be a schooner about equal in tonnage to the buccaneer craft.

Her points were however finer in every way than were those of the Firebug, and she carried more sail, much as the pirate was able to spread aloft.

Her number of guns were counted and found to be equal; but there seemed not so large a crew upon her decks as could Ricardo boast of.

She had evidently been at anchor in the inlet when she had sighted the pirate sailing along the shore and at once had started in chase.

As she sailed out of the inlet the pirate crew were loud in praise of her beauty, and, feeling no anxiety as to her catching them, knowing the speed of their vessel, they watched her with deepest interest.

Then she squared away in chase, with the wind abeam, bending over gracefully to the seven-knot breeze, yet standing up better than did the Firebug.

"She is gaining, sir," said Senor Midas to his chief.

Ricardo had only to take a short look through his glass to convince himself of that fact.

"Yes, what is the matter with the Firebug?"

"She is doing her best, sir."

"Well, set every stitch of canvas that will draw, and see if she cannot throw the fellow off."

The order was obeyed, and jibs, topsails, squaresail and fore and mainsail were all soon drawing well.

But still the stranger gained.

"I don't understand it," muttered Ricardo.

"Nor I, senor,"

Nor did the crew.

But the fact remained that the vessel astern was certainly gaining.

"We have just had the schooner overhauled too, from keel to truck, and she never was in better trim," said Ricardo.

"No, senor, never."

"Change her course, Midas, for we are out of range, and put her on her best point of sailing."

This was done, but the stranger also changed his course, and so rapidly gained that the pirates saw the pursuer was at his best point of sailing when going to windward.

A curve of the coast now gave the pirates a chance to square away before the wind, and the order was given to do so.

Almost instantly, as though working by the same command, the strange schooner did likewise.

"She still gains, senor," said Midas, after a short while.

"I can see that, sir," snappishly retorted Ricardo.

Then, as he saw that the stranger had gained less with the wind abeam, he put the schooner back upon her first course of sailing.

The stranger followed promptly, and now was hardly a league astern.

Within three hours he had gained half a league.

"This looks bad, senor, for she steadily walks up on us," said Senor Midas.

"I thought the only craft that ever floated, to outsail the Firebug, was at the bottom of the Gulf with Lafitte's bones in her; but it seems yonder craft is much fleetier," remarked Ricardo.

"Yes, sir, I never saw a craft sail like her," returned Midas.

"Well, outsailing us is not whipping us, Midas," grimly said Captain Ricardo.

"No, indeed, sir."

"We will hold on as we are, only keep nearer shore, so if we are beaten we can escape in our boats."

"Yes, senor."

"But that does not mean we are to be beaten, Senor Midas."

"Oh, no, senor."

"The men must know that they have to fight, and whip."

"Yes, sir."

"Must get iron sometimes, Midas, along with gold."

"Certainly, senor."

"And, Midas?"

"Yes, captain?"

"I should like that craft."

"Ah, senor!"

"She would be a treasure, and you could command the Firebug."

"Thank you, Senor Ricardo."

"With two such vessels we could do double the work that one can."

"Yes, captain."

"I shall take her."

"Senor?"

"I shall capture that craft."

"Fight her, sir?"

"Let her fight me, and in the end board and carry her."

"I don't wish to hurt her hull or rig, so the gunners must fire wild, and we'll carry her by boarding."

"Yes, sir."

"I'll still run for it, you see, let him overhaul us, and then go about and board, and the beautiful schooner is ours."

"It will be a bold game, senor."

"Yes, and one that I will play to a successful end, so go forward among the men and let them know my game."

Midas obeyed, and Ricardo turned and eyed the persistent pursuer coming swiftly along in the wake of the Firebug.

CHAPTER VIII.

"THE FIREBUG AHoy!"

THAT the craft in his wake was now gaining rapidly upon him, was a cause of great delight to Ricardo, who was glad to note how rapidly his tireless pursuer could sail.

He quietly ordered his schooner put in perfect fighting trim, told the men that as they had to fight a cruiser they might as well know that victory meant the capture of an armed craft, far fleetier than their own, and therefore considerably safer for them to sail in, as no vessel afloat could catch her.

"They cannot build a fleetier craft, men, and so she must be ours," he ended his little speech with, and the pirate crew cheered him to the echo.

In the mean time the pursuer had crept up steadily upon the pirate, and was now within good range.

But she had not opened fire, and the thought suddenly struck Ricardo that he was not certain as to her nationality.

"She looks American, but then the English have a number of American-looking craft, and there are privateers belonging to both the United States and the British Navy," said Ricardo, while Midas rejoined:

"Then, senor, she may be French or Spanish, you know."

"True, and if either, our work will be easy."

"But if English or American, we will have to fight hard."

"I only wish she would show her colors."

"Yes, sir; but see, the wind freshens, and she gains more rapidly."

"You are right, and in the forty knots we have logged since sighting her, she has gained four miles."

"I didn't think it could be done with the Firebug, Midas."

"Nor I, senor; but would not a shot make her show her colors?"

"Try it."

One of the stern guns was then sighted and fired, and the shot cut dangerously near the schooner in chase.

But no reply came, and no colors went up to the peak.

Again a shot was fired, but with like result.

"I can hit her squarely this time, sir," said the gunner.

"You do, and I'll have you hanged," was the angry retort of the pirate captain.

The gunner looked amazed. He had been below when it was given out that no harm should be done the beautiful schooner, more than was necessary.

"Don't you want me to hit her, sir?" he asked, in surprise.

"No, you fool! I want to capture her without a scratch, if I can."

"I see, sir," and the gunner fired again, this time sending his shot far wide, for he had no desire to hang, and he knew Ricardo was a man of his word, as far as all cruel threats were concerned.

"Show the American flag, Midas!"

The order was promptly obeyed.

But no response came from the stranger.

Run up the British ensign, Midas!"

This was done, with like result.

"Now we'll convince him that we are Spanish, for show the flag of Spain, and luff sharp and give him a broadside, but mind you, not a shot is to strike him."

"Ay, ay, sir," and the order was given by Senor Midas.

Down came the British ensign, up in its place fluttered the flag of Spain, and luffing until her broadside bore upon the pursuer, the guns flashed forth.

Not a shot touched the beautiful craft, as was intended, and yet, when the smoke of the guns had blown off, and the schooner was once more on her course, the stranger was still serenely pursuing, and no flag had been set.

Ricardo looked at Midas, and the latter returned the look.

Both wondered, and the other pirate officers and the crew wondered too.

If it had been night the pirates might have begun to dread the craft.

But they saw her in broad daylight, though many regretted that the sun was nearing the horizon.

The schooner had set no extra canvas, since she had run out of the inlet, but had quietly followed in the wake of the Firebug, and steadily gained the while.

Her crew were visible upon her decks, and a man sent aloft with a glass reported that he could count but twenty-two men upon her decks, including an officer and the man at the wheel.

Did her commander think he could capture the Firebug with a force so small, Ricardo wondered.

Still he was determined to stick to his resolve to do the beautiful vessel no harm, could he avoid it, and relying upon his terrible boarders, he did not doubt but that he could readily capture the craft, even did her crew prove to be larger than his own, which he was assured was not the case, as he never went short-handed, and, in fact, carried a third more men than vessels of the tonnage of the Firebug were wont to do.

And so Ricardo gazed upon the splendid craft in his wake with interest deepening each moment.

He was vexed that he could not make her show her colors, though it made no material difference what flag she floated.

Still it was a great satisfaction for him to know just who he was fighting.

As he meant to board, he did not keep up his fire upon the stranger, feeling that the two vessels were as near equal in close action and boarding as they would be, if torn with shot.

He was rather glad, too, that the enemy did not fire, as he wanted all of his crew for boarding, and had a broadside duel been opened, many a man on each deck he knew would have gone down.

As the pursuer neared the Firebug, her wonderful beauty of outline was noted the more, and won great admiration among the pirates, from fore-castle to quarter-deck.

Her rigging seemed perfection itself, her sails fitted without a wrinkle, and her spars were slender, graceful and very long.

The amount of canvas she carried was remarkable, and the manner in which she carried it, standing well up under the pressure, was even more remarkable.

The stranger was now not more than a quarter of a mile away, and it could be seen, without the glass, that she had hardly more than a score of men upon her decks.

The breeze was now blowing a good ten knots, and both schooners presented a beautiful sight as they sped along over the waters of the Gulf.

The sharp bows of the stranger forced no foaming crest, a "bone in her teeth," before her, and her wake was a clean one.

The Firebug on the contrary drove a wave of foam before her, and left a foaming wake.

Both vessels were crowded with canvas, and looked like flying clouds.

Nearer and nearer drew the stranger, and just as the sun touched the watery horizon, a voice was heard hailing.

Like bugle notes the words rung out, sharp, distinct and penetrating, and every man on board the pirate schooner heard them and wondered, for it proved that they were known to the stranger.

The hail was:

"Ho the Firebug, ahoy!"

CHAPTER IX.

A DUEL AT SEA.

THE fact that the pirate was known to those on the strange schooner, as the hail proved, was a great surprise to Ricardo and his men.

The hail was in English, and Ricardo thought there was a familiar ring to the voice.

But he answered promptly:

"Who hails the Firebug?"

"Lafitte's son, and it is to be war to the bitter end, Captain Ricardo!" was the reply of Leo, as he sprang upon the bulwark and grasped the mizzen shrouds.

Then, at a wave of Leo's hand, the red flag with its golden wings floated out from the peak of his schooner, and still standing upon the bulwarks, the young commander gave the order to fire.

As thoroughly prepared as he was for action, Ricardo was taken aback.

The name of Lafitte he both hated and feared, and he had believed Leo to have gone down on the schooner.

The thought that Lafitte himself might have survived was a terrible one to him, and he for a moment seemed at a loss what to do, when he suddenly found himself confronted with a youth whose prowess he knew but too well, and with a vessel that was certainly the superior of his own as far as speed went at least.

He knew that all along in the tireless chase Leo had known who he was, having recognized the Firebug, and that he had not come unprepared for a hot fight he felt assured.

So it was, in his moment of hesitation and uncertainty that Leo got the first blow upon him, and the broadside of the Golden Wings was a fearful one.

The guns had been loaded with grape, for close quarters, and as the iron tore through the bulwarks of the pirate craft, sending showers of splinters on all sides, men were cut down like grass, and a dozen lay upon the decks.

But Ricardo had been too often in action, when all depended upon his nerve, to lose his head for more than an instant, and he quickly gave orders to his helmsman to lay aboard the Golden Wings.

But Leo had no intention of allowing him to board, at least just yet, and, with the fleetest craft, and one that worked like machinery, he avoided the Firebug and poured in a second broadside, which was as deadly as the first.

Captain Ricardo now saw that, as if by magic, the decks of his enemy were full of men, and knew that Leo had a force nearly equal his own, so he gave up all idea of boarding the vessel just then, and felt that he had to resort to his guns, much as he hated to harm the beautiful craft.

Leo watched every movement of the Firebug, and saw that he was to get a broadside, so he gave the order to fire at the very moment that Ricardo did.

The guns almost flashed together, and yet the Golden Wings hit hardest, for the pirates had like their leader, temporarily lost their nerve.

The change from assured success, as they had felt, to a great uncertainty as to victory, at first demoralized them.

But, once they began to fire, they did their work well, and a hot duel was begun between the two schooners.

The Golden Wings certainly was handled best, for her sail-tenders were at their posts. Officer Lomax held the helm, and Leo was watching every move of his enemy with the eye of a hawk.

The guns of the Golden Wings, too, seemed to be manned more rapidly, notwithstanding the long experience of the crew of the Firebug, and Ricardo soon discerned that he was suffering three to one in comparison with his foe.

So once more he determined to board, and thus end the battle on the decks of the Golden Wings.

Before giving the order, he called upon his men to pour in a volley of musketry, hoping to greatly thin the crowded decks of his enemy.

But the very thick bulwarks of the Golden Wings caught the leaden hail and held it, and but a few men were hurt by the volley.

Leo had given orders to fire only grape, and Ricardo saw that he was thus aiming to cut down his crew and harm the schooner no more than was possible.

He, too, had also given orders to use grape-shot, but here again the massive bulwarks of the Golden Wings seemed well to protect the crew.

Having decided to board, Ricardo took the helm himself, and headed for the Golden Wings.

But his intention was skillfully thwarted by Lomax, who quickly avoided the blow, and working with great ease and rapidity the Golden Wings was swung around, and ere Ricardo could prevent, had been brought alongside of his vessel.

Again had the skillful maneuvering of the young commander placed the experienced pirate at a disadvantage, and when he had his men grouped to board the Golden Wings, Leo, with his crew came pouring upon his decks in an inscrutable avalanche of maddened humanity.

CHAPTER X.

LEO'S THREAT.

IN vain was it that Ricardo strove to stem the tide of humanity, which set resistlessly against him.

He had fought and won on many a deck, but now he felt that the tables were turned.

He several times tried to kill Leo with a pistol-shot; but the youth seemed to bear a charmed

life, and fought his way toward the man against whom he sought revenge.

The pirates were swept back, hurled overboard, thrown into the hold, or sprung through the open ports into the sea in the mad fight for mastery.

As solid as a line-of-battle ship, the men of the Golden Wings pushed forward, their young leader in the front rank, and his cutlass doing terrible execution.

At last the cry of quarter was heard, and in dismay, for he saw all was lost, Ricardo, cursing to the last, sprung forward with upraised cutlass and shouted:

"Leo Lafitte, let us end this fight with our swords, the victor to have both vessels!"

The pirates ceased their cries of quarter, for they well knew the prowess of their terrible chief, while the Golden Wings, with victory in their grasp, did not wish to let their young captain face a man such as Ricardo, and they cried out loudly against it.

"Silence all!"

It was Leo Lafitte who gave the command, and at once there was a silence on the vessel.

"Ricardo, you are beaten, and with your cunning you seek to win what now is lost.

"But I accept your terms.

"Clear the deck here, for this man to meet me!"

A look of diabolical hatred passed over the face of Ricardo.

He saw triumph already in his grasp, and was eager for the fray.

Then the men of both vessels divided, leaving a space amidships.

The dead and wounded were thrown aside, and the reddened, slippery decks were ready for the duel to be fought upon them.

The few moments of preparation had rested both Leo and Ricardo, and they faced each other in fairly good condition for the contest, though the youth had a slight wound on the forehead from a cutlass point.

The men were deeply interested, the crew of the Golden Wings anxious, for though they knew their young captain was a splendid swordsman, they dreaded the man who was his adversary.

But Leo never hesitated, and advanced to the attack in a manner that showed he was in deadly earnest.

The blades crossed, and at once they seemed like twining serpents of silver in the light of the battle-lanterns, for night had fallen upon the sea.

Ricardo was forced back, step by step, from the very outset, and was compelled to act upon the defensive wholly.

He tried in vain to get in a cut or thrust to kill the youth; but the son of Lafitte fought with wonderful skill and an earnestness that showed he would not be beaten.

Back against the mizzenmast Ricardo was driven, when almost instantly Leo Lafitte struck the pirate's cutlass from his grasp.

"Disarmed, and by you, boy! No, no! Lafitte's son, you shall die!" and Ricardo drew a pistol from his breast and thrust it into the face of the youth.

The treacherous foe pulled the trigger, but as he did so, Coola, Lafitte's African slave struck up his arm and Leo's cutlass point covered his heart.

"I have won, Ricardo, but I will not run you through, but now spare your life—to hang you!" said young Lafitte, calmly.

Ricardo uttered a wild cry of rage, and would have sprung upon the youth had not the African held him fast in his strong arms, and dragged him among the crew of the Golden Wings.

"Men, do you submit or shall the fight begin again?" and Leo turned to the pirates, who were now completely cowed.

With one voice almost they cried for quarter, and instantly they were thrown into irons.

"Now rig a noose for that man, and I will have completed my work," sternly ordered Leo, referring to Ricardo, who stood silently by, his face pallid, and his hands and feet in irons.

He started at the command and asked in a hoarse voice:

"Boy, would you hang me?"

"Yes."

"How have I wronged you?"

His words seemed to arouse a lumbering devil in the heart of Leo Lafitte, for, wheeling upon him, he answered in a voice that quivered, while his eyes burned with hatred:

"You ask how you have wronged me, Jean Ricardo?"

"I will tell you."

"I should like to know, and also why you would hang me?"

"Hang you?" cried Lafitte's son, in a voice that quivered with emotion. "No, I will not hang you, but load you with chains and force you to walk the plank into the sea!"

CHAPTER XI.

AVENGED.

AT the threat of Leo Lafitte, a cry of horror escaped the lips of Ricardo.

He had forced others to "walk the plank" to their death, and well knew the fearful nature of the punishment.

He glanced about him like a wild beast at bay.

His men were grouped together, but all were heavily ironed and could do nothing to save him from his fate.

In fact, the chances were that they would hang for their crimes.

So he again turned to Leo, who had just countermanded the order to rig a noose at the yard-arm, and prepare a plank on which Ricardo should walk to his death.

"Leo, again I ask you how I have wronged you?"

And for the first time in his cruel life of crime, Ricardo spoke in tones that were pleading.

Others had pleaded to him, but in vain.

Now would such be his fate? he wondered.

"Captain Ricardo," and Leo spoke in a low, but distinct tone:

"You pretend to be ignorant of the wrong you have done me and mine, so I will refresh your memory, and I have the story partly from my dead father's lips and from Coola here, my African slave, who prevented your sending a bullet into my brain awhile ago."

"One accuser is dead, the other is that black slave—am I to be accused on such testimony?"

"Yes."

"And of what do they accuse me?"

"My father told me that you once served with him as first luff of a slaver."

"I did."

"It was while a slaver that he got Coola here as his faithful follower, for you, angered with him, threw the poor fellow into the sea one night, and my father rescued him."

"Again, Commodore Lafitte told me that when he gave up the infamous life of a slave-trader on the African Coast, you became captain and turned your craft into a pirate, eventually joining him as one of his fleet captains."

"But Coola has told me more, for he said that my father, also becoming captain of an armed schooner, hoisted his outlaw flag and met your vessel."

"He visited you on your craft, and while there, a lovely captive, the daughter of a Spanish exile living in Jamaica, ran from the cabin and appealed for his protection."

"My father rescued her from you, beat off your vessel, and your captive afterward became his wife, my mother!"

"In all the time that you have been a captain of Lafitte's League, you have been the chief's foe, and, trusted with the command of the stronghold, you plotted to become the leader and kill my father, but your love of liquor prevented and lost us the island, you escaping in your vessel here."

"It was while pursuing your vessel that we ran upon the British brig Vulture, which sunk our schooner and lost my father his life."

"Since then you have been the cruellest of the cruel upon the seas, and I vowed to hunt you down and avenge the capture of my mother, my father's death, and punish your treachery."

"I have taken your vessel, and your crew shall go to New Orleans in irons, excepting a few that I know would have been true to the Golden Wings flag of Lafitte."

"Those I will ship upon my vessel."

"Now, Ricardo, prepare for death, for you have but ten minutes to live."

The calm manner of Leo seemed to impress the outlaw captain.

He felt, and knew the truth of all that the young captain of the Golden Wings said to him, but he loved life, and would make an appeal for mercy.

He had intended leaving the sea in another year, and enjoying the riches he had gotten in his life of crime.

Now he saw all hope fading from him, and in agony of spirit he turned to Leo and said:

"Captain Lafitte, I have been a guilty man for long years; I have wronged you, your father and your mother, and I am sorry that I did so."

"But I am rich—rich beyond your belief, and have recently hidden away a vast treasure."

"Spare my life, land with me and go to where that wealth is buried, and I will give you one-half of it."

"I know that your father lost his all, in the burning of the stronghold, and that you have that vessel to gain riches by."

"But I will enrich you without your going to piracy, if you will only spare me."

"You plead in vain, Ricardo, for I have ample riches, or that which will bring gold, and I would not spare you, had I not, for all of your treasure."

"You must die."

Ricardo groaned, and again pleaded for his life; but Leo was deaf to all pleadings, and watched the rigging of the staging up to the plank that Ricardo was to walk.

"All ready, sir," announced Officer Lester, saluting politely.

"Muster all hands to witness punishment, Senor Lester."

"Ay, ay, Captain Lafitte," and it was done.

"Now load that man in double irons!"

This was also done, Ricardo standing with bowed head and trembling form.

"All ready, sir."

"Ricardo, will you show that you have some manhood left, and walk to your death, or shall I order my men to carry you up and throw you into the sea?"

A moment of silence, and then came the question:

"Are you not merciful?"

"I am utterly merciless."

"You will not spare me?"

"No."

"Then I will walk to my death."

As he spoke the pirate captain lifted his chains about him, walked boldly up the staging and stood on the plank, which would tip with another step and launch him into the sea.

A moment he stood there, amid a deathlike silence, and then cast an appealing look toward the son of Lafitte; but the avenger was merciless.

In that stern face, removed by the battle lantern, Ricardo saw that there was no mercy, and with a bitter curse upon his lips he took the fatal step and plunged into the sea, the chains dragging him rapidly down into the dark depths, which he had so often crimsoned with the blood of his fellow-beings.

CHAPTER XII.

CONDEMNED FOR A FATHER'S SINS.

THE Governor of Louisiana, in whom great power was invested after the Battle of New Orleans and during the continuance of the War of 1812 with Great Britain, was yet cramped in his authority by the body of committeemen who held the right to veto his acts by a two-thirds majority.

It was, therefore, these committeemen, some of them with contracted ideas, and bigots, who had stood in the way of the governor where Leo Lafitte was concerned.

Lafitte the pirate chief of the Barratarians, had sent his son to the governor, and to General Jackson, telling of his offer from the British General, Pakenham, and that he not only refused it, but tendered his services to the Americans without asking reward.

Both General Jackson and the governor had been pleased with the handsome, fearless youth, and through him his father had come to New Orleans and fought against the British, with only the promise of a pardon.

The reader is already aware how the committeemen, when again in power, after the battle, sought to throw Lafitte in irons, seize his vessel and perhaps hang him, prior to the coming of his pardon, and how, through Leo's being informed by Mercedes, the Nun, of this intention, the outlaw chief had risen from his wounded bed at the convent and put to sea, to meet his death under the guns of the British brig-of-war Vulture.

Through all the governor had been the staunch friend of Leo, who had returned and reported his father's death, and then had taken the Vulture in as a prize.

But the committeemen, or the majority of them, had hated Lafitte and refused to believe in the honesty of his son, even after all that he had done.

Many of them had suffered in their fortunes, from the ravages of Lafitte upon the high seas, and they were revengeful, and so meant to visit the sins of the father upon the son.

It will also be remembered that Leo was to be on board the American brig-of-war, under command of Captain De La Tour, and forced to serve as a spy upon all pirates in the Gulf; but he had again been warned by Sister Mercedes

and quietly left with his men, who had brought the Vulture into port, and returning to his old island home, had put to sea in the Golden Wings once more, his purpose being to hunt down Ricardo.

Captain De La Tour not knowing Leo as the rescuer of his beautiful daughter, but knowing him only as the son of Lafitte, had left New Orleans in chase of the schooner which it was known the young sailor had left in hiding some where while he came in on the Vulture with a prize crew.

The general, the governor, and in fact all others who had heard of the wounding of Lafitte the day of the battle, had supposed that it had been received in action from a British musket.

But Leo and others in the pirate crew manning the heavy battery on the bank, knew that a boat had landed in the din and smoke, and an officer had sprung out within a few feet of where Lafitte and Leo stood.

Those who saw him supposed him an *aide de camp*, until, seeing Lafitte he had raised his pistol and fired.

Lafitte had fallen, and the officer had sprung into his boat and gotten away, though, but for the command of the wounded chief, he would have been shot down, or pursued by Leo.

The command of his father to let the officer go unharmed, and the remark that he had reason for his shot, Leo never forgot, and it told him that private revenge had instigated the act.

In the moment that he had seen him, Leo had indelibly stamped the face and form upon his memory, and felt that he should know him again, meet him where he might.

The man who had thus fired upon Lafitte was Captain De La Tour, and with a hatred for Lafitte, the cause of which will be known ere this romance closes, he visited his hate upon the son of the pirate chief, and strongly urged the committeemen to be merciless toward the youth.

That he had the pardon of the President for the past, Captain De La Tour and the council well knew; but his having gone to sea with his father, without permission, his having fought on the high seas, and his being then in command of an armed schooner had, in their opinion, outlawed him again, and canceled the pardon, no matter what service he had rendered the Government.

If Leo, therefore, would consent to go on the Nemesis, De La Tour's brig, and hunt down pirates, he might be forgiven for the sins of his father; but otherwise, he must still be held as an outlaw, and as such they regarded him, speaking of him in their consultations as the Creole Corsair.

But Leo had escaped to sea, and, as has been seen had run down Ricardo, captured his vessel and made the cruel buccaneer "walk the plank" to his well deserved doom.

Having repaired damages upon both vessels, Leo set sail, shaping his course for the Delta, when a sail hove in sight which proved to be a brig-of-war.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE STRANGE SAIL.

THE sail which had been sighted from the foretop of the Golden Wings, as she and her prize, the pirate schooner Firebug set sail for the Delta, was discovered to be an armed brig.

She had been sailing on a southerly course, but when sighting the two schooners at once headed toward them.

Both schooners had suffered in the action, and there was much to be done on board of each, so, after his execution of Ricardo, Leo had ordered the wounded to be first cared for.

This duty being done the dead were buried and then all hands were set to work repairing damages.

What gold was found on board the prize, and it was considerable, Leo divided among his own crew for their good services, taking nothing for himself.

The booty, arms and all else, with the prisoners, excepting a score of men who he knew had ever been faithful to his father, and whom he added to his crew, he determined to turn over with the schooner as a prize to Governor Claiborne.

Since his mingling with others, outside of the buccaneers, Leo had begun to feel the enormity of piracy, and, though he loved his father devotedly, yet he felt that his career had been a most evil one.

For himself he had felt the ambition to lead an honorable life, and he hoped to win the posi-

tion, which the governor had held out to him, of an officer in the navy of the United States.

His ideas of law were crude, and he saw no harm in sailing under his new flag, with its red field and golden wings, so long as he did not commit piracies under it.

He had taken the Vulture, and captured Ricardo and his vessel, and hoped to yet run down other pirates, though smaller game, and thus win his way to fame and an honorable career in life which would make people forget that he was the son of Lafitte.

With these feelings he had started for the Delta with his prize.

The repairs had taken time, so it was several hours after sunrise when the brig-of-war was sighted.

A long look at the stranger convinced Leo that she was greatly his superior.

What nationality she was he did not know, though she looked American from her build and rig.

But then so many vessels had changed hands of late, between the British and Americans, that it was hard to tell unless he saw her colors, and these she did not show.

She was a beautiful craft, he saw as he went aloft and examined her with his glass, and she sailed very rapidly.

There was a good breeze, and her position was such that, if he held on his course as he was for the mouth of the Mississippi, she would get within less than a mile of him within a few hours.

But should he put away, as she then was, he could throw her several leagues astern.

Yet Leo determined to hold on to his course.

If she was British he would risk a fight with her with both of his vessels, promising the pirate prisoners freedom, if they captured her, though the chances were against him, for the stranger was greatly superior in guns and men to both of the schooners.

If she should be Spanish or French, he had not much dread of her, yet would beat her off, for, the United States being at peace with those countries, he could not take her as a prize.

Should she prove to be American, he would signal who he was, and hold on his way, unless the commander of the brig, considering him a pirate, tried to capture him, in which case he would keep him at bay with his guns.

With this decision formed in his mind, Leo returned to the deck, and orders were given to crowd on all sail on both schooners.

The Firebug sailed well, and yet the Golden Wings would have forged ahead, but that sail was shortened upon her, so that she kept upon even terms with the prize.

The brig had set every stitch of canvas that would draw, and, seeing that the schooners meant to hold their course, was pressing on toward the point where she must be nearest to them when crossing their line of sailing.

Watching the speed of his schooners, and gauging it with that of the brig, Leo said:

"Senor Lester"—he had been so much among Spaniards he generally used the word *senor*—"we will throw the brig just about a mile astern of us, I think, holding on as we now are, and it will be just about sunset."

"Then it will be a night chase, sir, and at that distance her guns can do us much damage."

"Yes, if she means to fight; but I shall signal her if she is an American, that I am Lafitte's son, carry my pardon from the President, have been pirate-hunting, and my prize is Ricardo the Rover."

"If she still is in a fighting mood, I shall fire to cripple her and then escape."

"And what will be the result of it, sir, when you reach port?"

"I shall report that I beat off an American brig, who attempted to take me."

"May they not seize your schooner, sir?"

"They may seize the Firebug, yes, Lester; but not the Golden Wings, for I shall not take her into port."

"A good idea, sir."

"Yet I hardly think that even those hateful committeemen will be so revengeful as to withhold justice from me, when I surrender Ricardo's vessel to them."

If they should be, I fear I will lose faith in honorable dealings among men and feel that I can be little worse as a pirate," and Leo spoke bitterly.

"And shall I go with the schooner to the old retreat, sir?"

"No, for should anything turn up to give me trouble they would look for her there."

"You can head for the Pascagoula, and then I will come to you."

The day dragged its slow length along, and, as it neared the sunset beam the calculation of Leo, as to the distance between the schooner and the brig-of-war proved correct, for hardly more than a mile divided them, and, as a puff of smoke came from a gun on the cruiser, a shot flew over the Golden Wings and up to the peak went the Stars and Stripes.

"An American, I am sorry," said Leo Lafitte, and he gave orders to raise his colors and dip them in honor of the cruiser's flag.

CHAPTER XIV. BEATEN OFF.

WHEN Leo ordered his colors shown, and that they be dipped in salute to the brig-of-war, he hoped that would cause the cruiser to let him go on his way in peace.

But, the moment that the beautiful scarlet flag, with its huge gold wings fluttered out to the breeze, another shot came from the brig to heave to.

Leo did not obey the iron command, but instead sent up his signals, to the effect that the schooner was the Golden Wings, an armed craft, commanded by Lafitte's son, and cruising for pirates, while his prize was the vessel of Ricardo, the Rover, which he had captured the night before.

He furthermore stated by signal, that he was on his way to New Orleans, to deliver up to the authorities the schooner of Ricardo, and the prisoners and booty on board.

The signals were carefully read, and then came one in answer:

"You are at sea cruising without orders, or legitimate flag, so surrender your vessel and your prize, or I will attack you."

Leo's face became stern at this, but resolve was written upon every feature, and he replied by signal:

"I shall surrender my prize to the authorities at New Orleans, whither I am bound."

"Follow me there, if you wish; but I will not surrender to you."

Then came the signal:

"Lay to both of your vessels, or I will sink you."

Leo's response to this was to hold steadily on his course and to call his men to quarters.

The commander of the brig awaited to give Leo ample time to obey his command, and then, seeing that he held steadily on his course, he fired a shot over the Golden Wings to heave to.

But the Golden Wings kept serenely on her way.

Then the brig luffed sharp and poured a broadside upon the pretty schooner.

One or two shot struck her, another hit the Firebug, and both held on as before.

But Leo hailed Officer Lomax, who was in command of the prize:

"Ay, ay, sir," responded Lomax.

"Press on with all speed, and if I do not overhaul you, surrender your vessel to Governor Claiborne at New Orleans, with a full report of my cruise."

"Ay, ay, sir, but we can whip that brig, sir."

"Do as I order you, Lomax."

"Ay, ay, sir," and the Firebug held on her way, while the Golden Wings dropped in her wake.

"The brig sails about equal to the Firebug, so is very fast indeed; but we could run away from her, did I not wish to protect my prize, Senior Lester," said Leo.

"Yes, sir; but there comes another broadside."

As Lester spoke another broadside came from the brig, and the maintopmast was cut away, a gun dismounted, and half a dozen men cut down.

"This is too bad."

"I will cripple her, though I do not wish to take a life on board," and Leo turned to the handsome pivot-gun mounted aft on the Golden Wings, and which was a long eighteen.

He sighted the gun himself, with the utmost coolness, while the brig's shots were now flying constantly about them.

As the gun thundered forth its brazen defiance, in striking back, all watched the result with deepest interest.

It just cleared the foretopmast, to starboard. Again Leo fired, unheeding the shots now crashing about him, and the foretopmast of the brig was cut away.

A cheer went up from the crew of the Golden Wing, and a third time the young captain fired.

The shot struck the fore cross-trees and the foresail came down with a run.

Again the crew cheered, while the brig seemed to be momentarily thrown into confusion.

But she soon held steadily on, while men went aloft to repair the damage done.

Firing rapidly, yet with precision, though the shot from the brig was punishing his vessel and crew, Leo heard a wild yell from his men, and, as the smoke drifted away from his eyes, he saw that he had cut down her foremast.

"She is out of the chase, Lester; but I hope I have harmed none of her crew."

"There were half a dozen aloft, sir, when the mast went over—see, she has broached to, and yet is spiteful, for she gives us a last broadside!"

But the broadside was fired almost at random, the wreck of the foremast causing the brig to hold no steerageway, and not a shot struck the Golden Wings.

Watching the brig those on the schooner saw that boats were lowered, to pick up some of her crew, thrown from aloft by Leo's shot, evidently, and soon after twilight was followed by darkness, and the Golden Wings swept on her way in the wake of the Firebug, while the cruiser spitefully sent shots flying after her foe from the only gun that could be brought to bear, as long as she was in range.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SURRENDER.

GOVERNOR CLAIBORNE had been attending a meeting of the committeemen, and returned to his mansion to learn that there was a sailor awaiting to see him, and who said that his business was most important.

"Well, my man, what would you say to me?" said the governor, addressing a man in sailor garb, who was waiting out upon the piazza.

"I am Leon Lafitte, your Excellency," was the reply.

"Ah! I did not recognize you, Mr. Lafitte, in the darkness."

"Come with me into my library, and let me know why you are here, for your life is in danger, I frankly tell you, young man."

As the governor spoke he led the way, and Leo following, they were soon alone in the library.

"Be seated, Mr. Lafitte," said the governor politely.

Leo sat down, and then said:

"I am sorry to know, your Excellency, that my pardon from the President seems to be of no avail."

"Had you remained here, my young friend, it would have been; but going to sea as you did seems to have set the City Fathers wholly against you, and they are unfriendly toward you, when I am anxious to befriend you."

"Perhaps they will be more willing now to be my friends, your Excellency."

"Ah! that means that you have done more service for us?"

"I have captured Ricardo's vessel, sir."

"By St. George! but that is good news."

"But where is the craft?"

"Anchored above the city, sir."

"You brought her here then?"

"Yes, sir."

"To-night?"

"But an hour ago, your Excellency."

"This is indeed good news, my young friend, and I congratulate you."

"I thank you, sir, and I would surrender the schooner and prisoners into your keeping."

"I will gladly accept the charge; but tell me of your capture?"

"I sighted the schooner, your Excellency, a week ago and gave chase."

"After a chase of some hours I came up with him, and won the fight."

"You are modest indeed, but your vessel is a very smart craft to catch Ricardo's, for I have heard it said that the American brig-of-war Nemesis was the only one that could hold her own with the pirate, and she could not catch him."

"My Golden Wings is fast, sir, the fleetest craft I ever knew."

"Golden Wings, you call your vessel—a pretty name."

"Yes, your Excellency, after my flag."

"Your flag?"

"Yes, sir, for my father had as his private flag a blue field and golden wings, and for the ship's colors, as you know, a black field with wings of gold."

"Yes, its sable folds were well known in the Gulf," said the governor dryly.

Then he added anxiously:

"You did not fight under that flag, I hope?"

"No, sir, it went down forever, I trust, with my father."

"But I kept the little blue flag, and in place of the sable, for my fighting flag have a field of scarlet, with the wings of gold."

"And you fought Ricardo under this flag?"

"Yes, sir."

"And he fought under the skull and cross-bones flag?"

"Not exactly, sir, for his field was black, with a white skeleton form for center-piece, the bony hand clasping a red dagger."

"A hideous emblem certainly."

"But your action with him, was it a severe one?"

"Exceedingly, your Excellency."

"And the cruel monster is now your prisoner?"

"No, sir."

"Was he killed?"

"I executed him, sir," was the cool reply.

The governor looked surprised, and asked:

"How was that?"

"I was revengeful and forced him to walk the plank."

The governor felt that the young sailor before him was no ordinary person, and he could not but gaze upon him with admiration.

But he said:

"I am sorry you did not bring him here."

"He was a tricky fellow, your Excellency, and I took no chances of his escape, so made him walk the plank to his death."

"But here is my report, sir, of my cruise, which I have written out, and if you will send an officer on board with me, I will surrender the schooner into his keeping."

"I will do so, Mr. Lafitte; but where is your vessel?"

"I did not bring her into port, sir."

"Indeed, and why not?"

"I did not know just how the committeemen would treat me."

"I see," and the governor laughed and gave Leo credit for seeing pretty far ahead.

"Well, I hope they will now feel that you are honest, and be willing to sign my application to the President for a midshipman's berth in the navy for you, and if you do not rapidly rise, it will be a surprise to me."

"Now, I will ask you to go over this report for me, so that if there is anything to explain to the committee to-morrow, I will understand it."

"But first I will order an officer and men to be ready to go with you to the schooner you have captured, and have word sent my colleagues to meet in council at noon to-morrow."

So saying, the governor rung a bell and gave the necessary orders, when Leo, at his request, read his report in full.

When he read of beating off the brig-of-war, the governor's face looked grave.

"I fear, my young friend, you will find you have placed another stumbling-block in your way by that act," he said.

"What was I to do, sir; let him take my vessel and my prize?"

"It is a difficult point to decide, and yet I feel that you thought you were doing right."

"Did you know the brig?"

"No, sir."

"You are sure she was American?"

"Yes, sir; or she fought under false colors."

"And she held her own with you, you say?"

"She held her own with the Firebug, but the Golden Wings was under shortened sail, and could have dropped her, had I wished."

"It must have been the Nemesis, and if so, she is now heading for this port in her crippled condition, and just what the result will be is hard for me to determine."

"But the officer is here, and into his hands you can surrender the pirate schooner."

Leo arose and departed, accompanied by the officer, into whose hands, half an hour after, he surrendered the prize.

But the words of the governor had set him to thinking, and he was determined that his men should not be caught in a bad scrape.

So he said to Officer Lomax:

"Senior, you and the men must depart at once for I somewhat dread trouble, so I will find some coaster which can be chartered, to carry you back to the schooner; but you must get away as soon as possible."

A search for a vessel was made, late as it was, and for a snug sum in gold a coasting captain was found very willing to defer waiting for a cargo, and ready to sail at once with passengers.

Leo saw the craft depart, and then, with a lighter heart, and Coola, the African, as his only companion, sought the hotel where he had before stopped when in the city.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN IRONS.

It was a surprise to the City Fathers to be called to council so unexpectedly by the govern-

or so soon after their last meeting, and they wondered what could be the matter.

The pirate schooner had anchored above the city, and as she had come in at night, those who saw her supposed she was an American cruiser, which idea was further carried out by the fact that daylight showed the Stars and Stripes waving over her.

The governor was a trifle late in arriving at the council and all the City Fathers were there, some of them in quite a fever of curiosity.

At last the governor came in hastily, and all felt that he had some important communication to make to them, and were at once on the *qui vive* of expectation.

"Gentlemen, I have called you together to report the capture of Ricardo the Buccaneer," said the governor.

This was a startling announcement, and one that gave great pleasure.

"Can it be true?" asked one.

"The vessel is anchored above the city."

"Indeed! And the prisoners?" asked a City Father.

"Are on board."

"And the booty?" questioned one who had an eye to business.

"Is on board."

"And Ricardo himself?"

"Is dead."

"Killed in action?"

"No, executed by the one who captured him; but I have here the report of his captor, and I desire to read it to you, for it is explicit and you can understand the whole situation by hearing it."

Then the governor read the report, given him by Leo, and, supposing it to be from a naval officer, a great many words of praise were heaped upon the gallant commander of the Golden Wings, which was thought to be a new American cruiser.

But when the governor reached the part that told of the coming of an American brig-of-war, and the result, the City Fathers at once broke forth in denunciation, for they then discovered that the son of Lafitte was the captor.

That fact changed the entire situation, and quickly opinions were expressed which must have made Leo's ears tingle.

"He is but a pirate."

"He has so proven himself by firing upon a vessel-of-war."

"He should have surrendered."

"Of course he should."

"He has branded himself by this act."

"The idea of his doing such a thing."

"It is just like Lafitte, his father."

"This will hang him, sure."

"And wipe out the name of Lafitte."

The governor listened to this run of ideas patiently, and then said calmly:

"Sirs, let us look at this affair calmly, for there is need of it."

All gave him their attention at once.

"This youth was born on a pirate vessel, and reared there."

"He knew no other life, so his is not the blame of that."

"When pardoned he endeavored to lead a better life, and, leading the career of lawlessness that he has, he did not deem it wrong, doubtless, in hunting down pirates, though his vessel bore his own flag only, and was not in Government service."

"We have his gallantry in the battle of New Orleans, his capture of the British brig Vulture, and now the taking of Ricardo and his vessel, all in his favor."

"Against him we have his running to sea with his father, but that was before his pardon was received; his fighting the Vulture under his own flag, his cruising in his own vessel and capture of Ricardo, while the worst feature is his firing upon the Nemesis, for such must have been the vessel he beat off."

"The question, therefore, is whether he is to surrender his vessel, and we ask pardon for him for all offenses, or we arrest him as an outlaw?"

"This is for us to decide, gentlemen."

"Where is his vessel?" asked one.

"He did not bring her into port."

"Ah!" and the word was uttered in a regular chorus, ranging from deep basso to high tenor, according to the voice of the speaker.

"Where is she, your Excellency?"

"I do not know."

"And this young corsair?"

"He is at lodgings in the city."

"And his men?"

"He brought the pirate schooner in with a prize crew, and I suppose the latter are also in quarters here, for the craft was turned over

last night to Lieutenant Winston, of the navy, and a score of seamen."

"And the booty?" queried the business man.

"Is all on board the schooner and very valuable."

"Well, I say that he must be arrested, and his men with him, to await the coming of the Nemesis."

"Then his fate shall be decided, and quickly."

"Yes, arrest the young Creole Corsair," cried one.

This was the general opinion, and so papers were made out ordering the arrest of

"One Leo Lafitte, termed the Creole Corsair, and commander of the outlaw armed schooner Golden Wings, lawlessly cruising the Gulf, and committing piratical acts upon the high seas; said Lafitte to be put in irons and held in the city *carc* I until his fate was decided by the august body of committeemen."

An hour after the issuing of this document, which the governor and several of the City Fathers regretted, under the circumstances, Leo Lafitte was arrested and taken to the prison of the town, where he was placed in closest confinement, and with irons upon wrists and ankles.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONDEMNED.

THE City Fathers, with a few exceptions, hugged themselves with delight, when the brig-of-war Nemesis came into port under a jury foremast, and Captain De La Tour made his report of his action with the Golden Wings, which clearly set Leo Lafitte down as a pirate.

He had defiantly held on his course, when sighted by the brig, and the Golden Wings had dropped in the wake of the prize to defend her.

Captain De La Tour was an honorable man, and a just one, in spite of his personal hatred for Lafitte and all of his name, so he gave a truthful account of all that had occurred, and stated fairly that Leo had seemed to fire only to cripple the brig.

But, in the fall of the foremast one man had been drowned, and another killed, and this had certainly been sufficient to condemn him as a corsair.

He had run in under a jury foremast, and at once set men to work, repairing damages, so that he could again go in search of the Creole Corsair, as the City Fathers called Leo, and was surprised to find that he had brought his prize into port, and surrendered her, as he had said that he meant to do.

He had not expected it, and so had endeavored to seize the vessel.

His not having brought his own vessel in, the beautiful Golden Wings, seemed to look very suspicious, Captain De La Tour thought.

"She is the most beautiful craft I ever beheld, and, fast as is my brig, can sail three miles to her two."

"I must have that craft, gentlemen."

The councilmen thought so too, and said so.

"Where is he?"

The captain asked the question as though there was but one *he*.

All understood him, for in chorus came the response:

"In jail and in double irons."

That was right, of course; but where were his men?

That little point the councilmen had overlooked.

Messages were sent out hurriedly to look up the stopping-place of the crew of the Creole Corsair, while papers committing them to prison and putting them in irons, were made out, signed and sealed, and in it they were spoken of as:

"Any and all men belonging to the lawless crew of the pirate schooner Golden Wings, commanded by one Leo Lafitte, known as the Creole Corsair."

But the documents proved to be so much waste paper, for not one of the men could be found, in spite of the most diligent search for them, and the reason the reader well understands, as Leo's strategy had already gotten them out of reach of the law.

It did not take the news of Leo's "capture," as it was called, long to spread over the town, and a curious crowd gathered about the *carcel*, and stood with open-mouthed wonder, hoping against hope for a glance at the noted "young pirate," the son of the famous buccaneer commander, Lafitte.

Captain De La Tour was most anxious to get his brig at once in trim, and so the men worked day and night, putting in a new foremast, while alterations were made to hull and rig, which it was thought would increase the speed of the brig.

Her spars were lengthened and larger sails bent on, while her bows were sharpened and

her ballast replaced to bring her upon a more even keel.

Thus a week and more passed away, and Captain De La Tour was about ready for sea.

He believed that he would find the Golden Wings somewhere in the neighborhood of the old retreat of Lafitte, and thither he meant to sail.

But the councilmen wished him to delay his start for a few days, that his vessel might be used in a certain ceremonial that was to take place, and which was to serve as a warning for all men inclined to lawlessness upon the high seas.

That was no more or less than the hanging of Leo Lafitte, to the yard-arm of the Nemesis.

The City Fathers had put their heads together and decided upon the doom of the young outlaw.

The governor and a few others had urged to spare him, but the majority held their own, and his fate was sealed.

He was brought before the august tribunal, and faced them without flinching.

He looked them squarely in the face, told his story, since the day of the battle, and did it fearlessly, yet modestly.

He asked no mercy, and bowed and smiled when the sentence of death was passed upon him.

"The bravest fellow I ever saw, and how strangely like his father he is."

"Were he other than a Lafitte I could beg for him."

"As it is, I cannot," said Captain De La Tour.

To those who asked him about his men, he frankly said that he had sent them off.

"And why?"

"Because the governor said that I had done wrong in firing upon the brig-of-war, and I feared that the men might suffer if I did."

"They had come into port placing confidence in me, and so I sheltered them from harm."

"And where did you send them?"

"To rejoin my vessel."

"Where is your vessel?"

"I decline to tell you."

"You will be forced to do so."

"A man who is condemned to die, threats cannot frighten," was the calm reply.

"If we spare your life will you deliver up your vessel?"

"I will not."

"Why, do you not love life?"

"Oh yes."

"And you will not deliver up your vessel and men, to save your life?"

"I will not, for my men have trust in me which I will not betray."

"But if you are hanged?"

"They have officers to look after them."

"Who will at once become pirates?"

"They may," was the cool response.

"Well, you are doomed."

"I felt that, gentlemen, the moment I gazed into your faces," and Leo bowed to those who sat in judgment upon him and was led back to his prison, condemned to die, at the yard-arm of the Nemesis, within three days.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MERCEDES THE NUN.

"THEY have condemned him, Sister Mercedes."

"To death?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"At the yard-arm of the American brig-of-war, Nemesis."

"When, Father Felix?"

"At sunrise on the third day from this."

"Heaven have mercy upon him."

"Amen!"

The speakers were Father Felix, the good priest at the convent, and Sister Mercedes the Nun.

The priest had taken a deep interest in Leo, when he was visiting his wounded father at the convent, and, in looking over the testimony against him, had felt that the crimes laid against the youth had not been intentional sins.

He was the confessor of men of the City Fathers, and so was told freely their views, and he made known his.

A man of prominence in the community, his word had much sway, but not enough to save poor Leo.

To Sister Mercedes, whose deep interest in the youth he well knew, he had told all that he knew of Leo's case, trial and condemnation.

"Where is he now, Father Felix?" asked the nun.

"In the *carcel*."
 "And will he be taken from there at once?"
 "Not until midnight of the day before the execution."

"And then?"
 "He will be taken on board the brig-of-war *Nemesis*, to prepare for his execution, and I am to meet him there at that hour."

"I am glad that you will be with him in his last hours."

"I will give him what consolation I can, Sister Mercedes."

"Will not his removal through the streets at midnight cause a crowd of jeering men, who hate the name of Lafitte to follow him from the *carcel* to the shore?"

"I would that he could be spared this, good Father Felix."

"It is not known to the public when he is to be removed, and an officer and two marines will be sent for him in a carriage, as, heavily ironed as he will be to the moment of his execution, there will be no fear of an escape."

"Poor boy," sighed Sister Mercedes, and she turned away and sought her bedroom.

There she knelt in prayer for a long time, and when she arose her beautiful face was full of sad serenity.

"I will do it," she said in a low, firm voice.

That night the keeper of the *carcel* saw a carriage roll into the court, and from it alighted a veiled woman.

The keeper saw that it was a nun of the church of Rome, and being a good Catholic, he saluted her with reverence.

She presented a permit, signed by the governor, for her to visit the condemned Creole Corsair, Leo Lafitte, in his cell.

No one had thus far been permitted to see the prisoner, other than Father Felix, for orders were most rigid; but the nun was admitted.

Leo was fast asleep, and yet arose promptly at the call of the keeper.

"A holy nun to see you, monsieur," said the keeper of the *carcel*, who was a Frenchman.

He threw open the door, set his lantern upon the little table and took his leave with the remark:

"I shall have to lock you in, good sister; but I will return within half an hour."

"Sister Mercedes, in spite of your heavy veil, I know you."

"This is kind of you," said Leo, as the nun stood trembling before him, after the departure of the keeper.

"Sh—! do not breathe my name here, or say who it was that came, for I am not known, nor is it known that I have come here to a soul."

"It is more than kind of you to come and visit the young pirate, who, after repenting of his sins and getting pardoned, is to be hanged for his honesty," and Leo spoke bitterly.

"My son, your name has so long been a terror to men, that your accusers will wipe it out."

"But I believe in your honesty of purpose, and your actions have proven that you meant no harm."

"There are palliating circumstances in your case, which those who hate you will not consider, and the governor, Father Felix and a few others think as I do."

"It is very kind of you, Sister Mercedes; but I am doomed, and I will meet my fate as my father would have done, without flinching."

"Ah! I know that well; but tell me, Leo, were you free, what would you do?"

"I hardly know."

"You have a vessel?"

"Yes."

"Armed?"

"Yes, and well manned, while I believe she is the fleetest craft afloat."

"Why would you not enter some foreign service, and thus win fame?"

"I would, were I free, for it would be to my liking, now that I have avenged my father."

"And Leo, after you had won a name, it would be well to seek one who is your nearest of kin, and claim that which is by right your own."

"Going to him in a few years, when you had won an honorable name in foreign service, he would be glad to acknowledge you, I am sure, and you would be honored among men, for no longer need you be known as Lafitte."

The nun spoke earnestly, and Leo gazed at her in amazement.

"Who do you mean?"

"I cannot say more; but you will know in time."

"But I am condemned to die, good Sister Mercedes."

"Many men have been sentenced and never executed," was the significant response.

"What can you mean?"

"I can say no more, but do not despair—hope!"

"Now farewell, for the keeper comes; but again, Mercedes, the Nun, bids you *hope*."

A moment more and Leo was alone, and in his heart there was a forlorn hope.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MIDNIGHT VISITORS.

"No, there is no hope for me."

"Good Sister Mercedes merely told me to hope, that I would not despair."

"Night has come, my last night on earth, and with the morning's dawn I will be taken from my cell and run up to the yard-arm."

"So be it! I am Lafitte's son, and know no fear."

"Now to get what rest I can."

So saying, Leo threw himself down upon his humble cot, and in a few moments was fast asleep.

So soundly did he sleep that the keeper called him thrice ere he awoke.

"Ah, keeper, it is you, is it?" he said, pleasantly.

"Yes; the guards have come for you, monsieur, to carry you on board ship."

"Ah! has the night passed so soon?"

"Why, I have had a delightful sleep!"

"You are the coolest one I ever saw under the shadow of a death-sentence," said the keeper.

"Why, it is only death, and that I have been trained to face coolly."

"I am ready, Monsieur Keeper, and I thank you for your kindness to me," and Leo held out his hand.

"God bless you, monsieur!" and tears came into the eyes of the keeper.

Brushing them away, he said:

"Here is the officer and his guard."

Leo beheld, just outside of the cell, an officer in naval uniform, a sergeant and two marines, the latter carrying their muskets.

He saluted politely, and said pleasantly:

"I am ready, sir."

"Where are the keys, monsieur?" asked the officer.

The keeper took them from his belt and handed them to him, with the remark:

"This one unlocks the ankle-irons, and this one the handcuffs."

"Thank you. Now, prisoner, step between those two men. Sergeant, you fall in behind. March!"

Leo promptly obeyed the order of the officer, and they marched with slow step along the corridor.

A carriage, with the blinds closed, stood in the court, and a driver sat upon the box.

One of the marines got in first, then Leo, then the next guard—the two sitting on the front seat facing him—and the sergeant sprang upon the box by the side of the driver.

Then the officer gave orders to drive to the shore, off which lay the *Nemesis*, and entering the vehicle, took a seat alongside the prisoner, while the keeper of the *carcel* closed the door with a bang.

Away rolled the vehicle, and in twenty minutes' time drew up on the river-bank.

Leo saw that they were above the town proper, and in a grove of live oaks.

"Come, sir, dismount," said the officer, and the marines sprang out, Leo following as well as he could with his heavy irons.

The marines then walked away toward the river, the sergeant following, and, to the surprise of the prisoner the officer grasped his wrists and unlocked the handcuffs, and then the ankles.

Raising the chains he placed them in the carriage and simply said:

"Go."

The driver at once departed, and Leo said in a voice that showed his amazement:

"Does this mean that I am free?"

"Yes, sir."

"But who—"

"I can answer no questions now; but come with me, for yonder in the woods horses await us, and your way lies toward the lake."

Leo silently followed and soon they came upon a man holding two horses.

"Ah, Coola! you here my faithful friend?" said Leo, as he recognized his African slave.

"Coola here, master, and you here too—not in jail," was the reply of the negro.

"So it seems, if I am not dreaming."

"You wake, master."

"Come."

Leo turned to the officer, and said:

"I do not know you, sir, but you must be my friend, for you have saved me from death."

"I act for another, one who bade me give you this package."

"You will find that your slave knows where to take you, and I hope you will not delay, for the real guard from the *Nemesis*, will go to the *carcel* for you within two hours' time."

"Good-by, sir, and luck to you."

Leo thrust the package given him into his pocket, and grasping the hand of his rescuer said earnestly:

"From my soul I thank you, senator; but let me beg that you accept this as a souvenir of him whom men are pleased to call the Creole Corsair."

"I have been well paid for my services, sir."

"By whom?"

"The package may tell you, for I do not know."

"Describe him."

"It was a woman."

"Ah! but accept this as a souvenir of me at least," and Leo took from his pocket a ring in which a gem of rare value was set, and handed it to the pretended officer, who accepted it with fervent thanks, and then again urged Leo to depart.

"Yes, master, better go; this no good place," said Coola.

Thus urged, Leo mounted one of the horses, Coola sprang upon the other, and they rode away in the darkness.

CHAPTER XX.

FREE AS A BIRD.

"WELL, Coola, what does all this good fortune mean?" asked Leo, as, having left the town the negro led the way along the road leading to the lake.

"Know that lady come to Coola and tell him master must not die."

"Who was she?"

"No see her face."

"Was she a nun?"

"No, master, she dress like other leddies."

"But was veiled?"

"Yes, master."

"And what said she?"

"She told Coola go to lake and get boat, and offer him money, but he tell her he have plenty."

"She tell him to pick out fast fishing smack, with two men, and have it at point Coola thinks best."

"Then she tell him to have some provisions on board, but to work at night, so no one see him, for nobody know I was Lafitte's slave."

"So I did what she tell me, master."

"Well?"

"Then she say I was to come to the woods tonight and meet man holding two horses, and he would let Coola take them, and was to wait for you."

"That is all I know, master."

"You have done well, Coola, but I am sorry I cannot find out who the lady was, for if she was not dressed as a nun, it could not have been Sister Mercedes."

"Coola don't know."

"And you have secured the boat?"

"Boat waiting now."

"What is it?"

"Fishing sloop of ten tons."

"She will do well to run to Pascagoula in; but the men?"

"Men come back in boat after we reach schooner."

"True; but about these horses?"

"Man at shore to take them back to city, so must ride fast, for when real guard go to *carcel* and find you gone, make big fuss."

"You are right, and the whole town will be alarmed, so we must give the man time to return with his horses."

"This is a well-planned plot, Coola."

"Yes, master, leddy have much good sense."

So on they dashed, Coola, who had been over the road before, leading the way, until they at last drew rein upon the shores of Lake Borgne.

There, off-shore a cable's-length, lay a small sloop at anchor, her mainsail hoisted, and upon the sands was a small boat, while two men rode as the riders dashed up.

"Well, my men, you are waiting for me, I suppose?" said Leo.

"We are paid to wait for some one, sir."

"I am the one; but who is to take these horses back?"

"I am, sir," and one of the men stepped forward and grasped the reins.

"Here, my man, take this," and Leo gave him a handful of gold.

"Oh, monsieur, you are most generous; but I have my pay."

"It matters not, take what I give you and lose no time in getting your horses into their

stable, while, I suppose it is unnecessary to tell you to keep silent upon this night's work?"

"I will be dumb, sir."

"Now tell me who engaged you to serve me."

"A lady, sir."

"Who was she?"

"I do not know, sir."

"Young or old?"

"I did not see her face, for she was heavily veiled."

"Ah, and you could not tell me if I gave you thrice the amount of gold you have there?"

"No, sir, for I do not know."

"Well, my man, I thank you, and bid you good-night."

So saying, Leo stepped into the boat, while the man, mounting one of the horses and leading the other, rode away at a rapid gallop.

The other man, who belonged to the sloop, pushed the boat off and gave a shrill, long whistle.

No answer was returned, but it was without doubt a signal to some one on the sloop, for the jib was at once run up, and as the boat ran alongside the anchor left the bottom.

There was but one man in the sloop, and that all had been made ready for an instant departure, Leo saw.

A good breeze was blowing, and the sloop, under topsail, mainsail, jib and jibstaysail, went flying down Lake Borgne toward the entrance to the Sound, when she would have an open run to Pascagoula, where Leo had ordered Lester to go with the Golden Wings and await his coming.

The wind held fair and it was just after sunset of the following day when the sloop dropped anchor and Coola took the boat to row into an inlet in search of the schooner.

He was gone about two hours, and then the beautiful vessel was seen emerging slowly from the dark shadows of the land, her boats out ahead towing her, for there was no breeze inshore.

She ran down near the sloop, and Leo, after paying the two men of the sloop most handsomely, went on board the Golden Wings, where he was greeted by his officers and crew, for Lomax had arrived with his men some time before.

While lying in hiding, the Golden Wings had been made as good as new, and was headed for the pass between Horn and Turtle Islands, when she reached the waters of the open Gulf.

"Now what course, Captain Lafitte?" asked Officer Lester as they dropped Horn Island astern.

"To the Caribbean Sea," was the answer that surprised Lester, and after giving the command, Leo went into his luxurious cabin, and, taking the package from his pocket which the pretended naval officer had given him, he broke the seal and glanced at its contents.

CHAPTER XXI.

A TRAITOR IN CAMP.

A PARTY of soldiers marched into the court of the *carcel* and rung for entrance some two hours after the escape of Leo Lafitte.

An officer in naval uniform and six marines composed the party, and the keeper of the *carcel* opened the door.

"I am Lieutenant Dana, of the *Nemesis*, and have come for the condemned prisoner," he said.

"The prisoner?" the keeper echoed.

"Yes, sir."

"Which prisoner, sir?"

"Lafitte, the pirate."

"Why, he's gone."

"Escaped?"

"Oh, no sir, he went with the officer and guard sent from the brig for him."

"I am just from the ship, sir, and—"

"Is he not there?" gasped the keeper.

"He is not."

"And you were sent for him?"

"I was."

"I know you, Lieutenant Dana, but I did not know the other officer. My God! can a trick have been played upon me, for the prisoner left two hours ago?"

"He has escaped then," cried the officer, and he had the keeper tell him the exact particulars of the departure of Leo from the prison.

Then Lieutenant Dana hurried back to the ship and made his report to Captain De La Tour, who had retired.

But the captain hastily dressed and sought the governor and made known all that had happened.

Though secretly glad at the escape of Leo, and wondering how it had all happened, the governor did his duty promptly, and a general alarm was spread.

The town was at once patrolled by soldiers, guard-boats were put upon the river to check the sailing of any craft without being thoroughly searched, and the *Nemesis* set sail down the river to overhaul any vessel that might have sailed.

But the day dawned, and the escaped prisoner was not found, as is already known to the reader.

An early call was made for the City Fathers to meet in council, and there were many dark faces when they did so.

The facts were made known by the keeper and the lieutenant, and all wondered how it got out that the prisoner was to be removed at night to the brig, and by an officer and marines.

The keeper could not be blamed, for one in the uniform of a naval officer, accompanied by a sergeant and marines certainly was reason enough for his believing that all was right.

He had not seen the driver's face, nor noticed the carriage particularly; but he was sure that Leo did not suspect an escape when he was taken from the prison.

Such was the report of the keeper.

"Has any one visited the prisoner, sir?" asked the governor.

"No one but Father Felix, your Excellency, and the nun, who came with your permit."

"A nun who came with my permit, sir?" asked the governor.

"Yes, sir."

"I gave no such permit."

"She certainly had a permit signed and sealed by you, your Excellency."

The governor's private secretary was sent for, and he also knew nothing of a permit being given, other than to Father Felix.

Father Felix was sent after, and he stated that he had lost, or misplaced the permit.

This seemed to give a clew that it had been stolen by some one, and the name of Father Felix erased and another one placed on the paper, and the idea was advanced that it was not a nun who had called, but one in holy garb, and the conspirator, or conspirators, who had plotted the release of Leo Lafitte.

Father Felix showed the utter impossibility of any one from the convent visiting the prisoner, without his knowledge, and certainly of having plotted the escape.

No, the suspicion did not fall upon any one from the convent, but, knowing the hour at which the prisoner was to be removed to the brig, and taking all things into consideration, it was felt that there was a traitor in camp, right among the City Fathers, and each looked upon the other with suspicion.

It seemed evident that Leo's pirate gold purchased his pardon, but who had been the bribe-taker no one would say, if they had any direct suspicions upon the subject.

There was one thing certain, and that was that Leo Lafitte, the Creole Corsair, had escaped, and there was to be no hanging that day.

The governor returned to his mansion sorely puzzled.

It was certain that Leo had true friends in New Orleans, and those who could plan a bold game and carry it out.

Who they were he could not guess.

And what would Leo's course be now, for his treatment by the City Fathers had been such as to drive him to piracy in earnest, he feared.

He knew that the Golden Wings was not far from New Orleans, a splendidly armed, manned and equipped vessel, and the fleetest on the seas.

Where to look for the one who had befriended Leo, no one seemed to know, and all were puzzled and anxious, knowing that suspicion might fall upon any one of them.

Father Felix also put his thinking-cap on, for the keeper of the *carcel* had said that a nun had visited the prisoner, and then his pass was gone, and where, or how, he could not tell.

He wished to talk the matter over with Sister Mercedes, but the good nun had been confined to her room for some days, from severe indisposition it was said.

And so the matter rested, with the two facts staring all in the face that the young Creole Corsair had escaped, and that there was certainly a traitor in the camp who had befriended him.

CHAPTER XXII.

WINNING HIS WAY.

THE Carthaginians were struggling against a powerful foe, fighting for freedom, and to prey upon the commerce of their enemy, a number of fleet sailing vessels had been armed, manned, and sent forth to sail the seas.

One of them, the pride of the Carthaginians,

had captured several prizes of value, and was running for port with them, when just at sunset a Spanish cruiser came in sight and gave chase.

The plucky little vessel that was conveying her prizes, wished to save them, and so had them stand on together while she remained to fight the enemy, though with the chances against her.

Just as the action was begun, another enemy, a small schooner, hove in sight and sped away in chase of the three prizes.

Then, to the eye of the commander of the Carthaginian cruiser, it looked as though he was to sacrifice his vessel for the sake of saving his prizes, and that they should also be taken.

It was a gloomy outlook, but he began the fight pluckily, and the flashes of the guns illumined the sea for a long distance around the adversaries, and soon, in the distance other firing was heard and the Carthaginian sailors knew that their prizes had also been attacked.

Lying at anchor in a sheltered cove, at the time the lookout on the Carthaginian cruiser sighted the enemy, was a vessel which the reader cannot fail to recognize, for, once seen the Golden Wings could not be mistaken when again met with.

She had come thus far upon her southerly course, and the port of Carthage was her destination.

Not wishing to boldly enter the harbor, until he knew that his offer would be accepted by the patriots, Leo Lafitte had sought an anchorage inshore, determined to make his way in a small boat to Carthage and there offer the services of himself, his crew and vessel.

He had intended starting the following morning, when the lookout reported a Carthaginian cruiser in sight, convoying three large vessels, evidently prizes, and a Spanish brig and schooner in chase.

Leo at once saw his opportunity of commanding terms with the Government he sought, and so, just as the three prizes had hove to, under the fire of the Spanish schooner, the Golden Wings shot out from her anchorage and headed for the Spanish schooner.

The latter was taken by surprise, but prepared to fight; but the Golden Wings went into action with a rush, her first broadside dismounting two guns on board of the Spaniard and doing deadly work as well among her crew.

The Spaniards fought well, but Leo Lafitte's crew were cool, fired with fatal effect, and the Golden Wings was handled in a masterly manner.

The prize-crews on the captured vessels looked on with the deepest interest, and wondered what the result would be, for they looked upon the strange vessel as a friend, though they could not make out, from the flashing of the guns, the flag that waved over her decks.

But the action did not last long, as the Golden Wings, after delivering a few of her fearful broadsides, swept down to board, and the Spanish captain hauled down his colors.

Throwing a prize-crew on board, Leo at once headed for the two combatants fighting so fiercely a league away.

He saw that the Spanish cruiser was vastly inferior to the plucky little Carthaginian, whose crew he knew must be reduced from the men put upon the prizes, and he felt that the unequal combat could end but one way.

So all sail was put on the Golden Wings, the few dead thrown overboard, the wounded cared for below, and her decks put in trim for another fight.

As she neared the two vessels, Leo saw from the flashes of the guns that the Carthaginians' resistance was rapidly growing weaker, and he headed for a position that he might open upon the Spaniard.

Just as he did so the fire of the Carthaginian ceased; but ere her colors could be hauled down, a broadside from the Golden Wings told of help near, and the Carthaginians, with wild cheers of delight, renewed their fighting.

Both vessels had been so taken up with their own combat, and the roar of their guns had been so incessant, that the firing that had reached their ears from over a league away was supposed to be the Spanish schooner trying to capture the three prizes.

Now, when on the very eve of victory, the Spanish cruiser received a well aimed broadside from a new foe, it carried consternation to every heart on board.

But they had seen their new enemy, and recognizing that it was only a small schooner, felt able to capture another prize.

But the Spaniards had not counted upon the very rapid and fatal fire of the Golden Wings, and her masterly handling, which caused them

to receive a third broadside before they got a chance to hit back at their daring foe.

With the Carthaginian cruiser also renewing the fight, the Spaniard was placed between two fires, and the result was contrary to their expectations, for within a few moments the Golden Wings forced the enemy to strike his colors.

Sending Officer Lester on board to take possession of the prize, Leo signaled the commander of the Carthaginian to come to him on the Golden Wings, and not long after a boat from the brig ran alongside.

It contained the commander of the Carthaginian cruiser, a handsome man of fifty, whose head was bound up with a handkerchief from a wound received in the action.

"Ah, Senor Captain, you have saved my vessel and my prizes, or have you simply captured all for yourself?" he asked, as Leo met him at the gangway.

"No, Senor Captain, I was on my way to Carthagena, to offer the services of my vessel in your cause, and was glad to strike a blow for you."

"I am a Creole sailor, own my craft, and wish to sail under the flag of Carthagena, rather than the one that now floats above my decks."

The Carthaginian glanced curiously at the red flag and its Golden Wings, as the light of the battle-lanterns fell upon it and said:

"Were it a black field, senor, then I would say that it was the flag of Lafitte, the Pirate of the Mexican Gulf."

"Such was his flag, senor, but the red field is mine, and I am Lafitte's son."

"Are my services any the less welcome to Carthaginians?"

"Oh, no, senor, and you will be most welcome by the Government, while your services this night alone would have won you recognition and high rank in our service."

"I thank you, senor, and you are at liberty to give orders to suit you, for your prizes are safe, and a pretty fair armed schooner is another prize for you, which will, with yonder cruiser, add two more vessels to the Carthaginian navy."

"Give your orders, Senor Captain, and I obey."

The Carthaginian gazed upon the handsome face of the young victor, and said:

"I thank you, Senor Captain Lafitte, and you may rest assured that a warm welcome awaits you from my people, when they know that you have not only saved us a cruiser and three most valuable prizes, but added two armed vessels to our navy, besides your own beautiful craft."

"We will sail, senor, as soon as we can secure the prisoners and repair damages."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE NUN'S LETTER.

THE services of Leo Lafitte and his Golden Wings had been accepted by the Carthaginian Government with a great deal of delight, at gaining such a fearless young officer, and so splendid a craft to add to their navy.

The story told by the Carthaginian captain, and he was loud in Leo's praise, caused a grand welcome to be extended to the young hero, who had changed a defeat into a glorious victory, and every honor was heaped upon him.

Leo bore these honors modestly, and anxious to be at sea, winning fame in the new field he had chosen, set sail from port a week after his arrival.

It was not very long before he returned to port with several valuable prizes, and the Carthaginians vied with each other to render him homage.

Unspoiled by flattery, he did not remain long in port, to be the lion of entertainments given him, but once more put to sea, and, ere he had been a year in the service of Carthagena, the Golden Wings and its young commander had won undying fame.

One night, as the Golden Wings was cruising along under shortened sail, not far from the coast of Jamaica, Leo descended into his cabin and sat down at a table, apparently lost in deep meditation.

"One year ago to-night my father lost his life, and how strange it is that I, with the papers he gave me telling me all I would know, that I have never opened the package, which good Sister Mercedes returned to me unopened."

"I will again glance over her letter to me, and I believe to-night I will break the seal and read what my father wrote to me."

He arose, and going to a secret locker, touched a spring and it opened.

Within were revealed a number of odd things,

but Leo passed these over, and took up a roll of papers.

They consisted of the package handed him by his father, and that which had been given him by the pretended officer who had aided him to escape from the *carcel* in New Orleans nearly a year before.

The latter package had been opened, the seal being broken, and this he took up.

It consisted of several sheets of paper, written in a bold though feminine hand, and he read aloud the contents.

It was dated at New Orleans, the day before Leo's escape from the *carcel*, and was as follows:

"LEO:—

"I return to your keeping, with seal unbroken, the package given you by your father, and which at my entreaty, you gave into my hands."

"It was wrong for me to ask it of you, and when, in the quiet of my room, I felt that it was a message from the dead, which I had no right to keep from you, I decided that I would not open it, but return it to you."

"Now I do so, and the story it will tell, will make known to you much that has seemed mysterious to you: will tell you of your father, of Mercedes the Nun, of others and yourself."

"That I would atone for aught that may stand recorded against me in the past, I will prove by my determination to save you from the cruel fate which those in authority have decided should be yours."

"I feel that your father acted from the nobleness of his nature, never wholly contaminated by his life of crime, when he refused the offers of the British and voluntarily offered his services to America."

"He hoped, by securing a pardon, to remove the stain of piracy from you, I am sure."

"Fate fought hard against him, and in spite of your noble deeds to win pardon, a cruel destiny has held you back, and even now you are under the shadow of the gallows, for crimes of which in your heart you are guiltless."

"Feeling as I do, and wishing to atone for the past, I now determine to save you."

"My plot is a good one and shall succeed."

"Father Felix has a pass, duly signed and sealed, permitting him to visit you in the *carcel*."

"This permit I secured secretly, and erasing his name, wrote another, that of a supposed nun, and thus I was able to see you and bid you hope."

"Feigning sickness—and I acted with deceit only to save life, your life—I took into my confidence two sisters whose sympathy was mine and yours."

"I pretended to be ill, confined to my room, and thus was enabled to leave the convent at night, in a disguise."

"I sought a hotel, and in the garb of a lady in mourning, went to a man who was suspected of being a spy for your father, for so I remembered seeing once in the newspaper."

"I had an interview with him and felt that he would serve me well, for gold, as well as from a desire to help the son of Lafitte."

"Ah! the deceit that I practiced, and which it will take many a prayer to gain forgiveness for, and which I confess to you."

"One of these days I shall confess all to Father Felix but it will be when the shadow of death is upon me."

"I implied that I was your mother, and he pitying me, did all that he could."

"I told him that I had found out how you were to be taken on board the *Nemesis*, and when, and thus was enabled to plan your rescue."

"I saw your slave, and happy was he to find me enlisted in your behalf, for the faithful fellow was planning your rescue by force, and was gathering a number of men for that purpose."

"I gave him my plan and he gladly yielded to it, and it was his suggestion to have a vessel in waiting out in Lake Borgne."

"The man that was your father's friend did all that I could wish, for he secured men to act as an officer of the *Nemesis*, and a guard of marines, procured a carriage with a faithful driver and hired horses to await you and bear you to the lake."

"The gems you gave me from your father, to pay for prayers for the rest of his soul, procured me all the gold needed, and they are disposed of in a good cause—to save your life."

"Now you know all, Leo, and when you read these lines I feel that you will be free and far away from danger."

"That you need expect no mercy here, you know, so go far away and build up for yourself a career of honor, for the world is before you."

"The Virgin protect and Heaven forever bless you, is my prayer."

"Now all is ready, and I must return to the convent wall and leave it to others to carry out the plans I have formed to save you."

"Farewell, and again I pray may Heaven guide you to an honorable career."

"MERCEDES THE NUN."

CHAPTER XXIV.

GOLDEN WINGS TO THE RESCUE.

FOR some time after reading the letter of Mercedes the Nun, Leo sat in deep thought.

Every line told him how great the sacrifice she had made to serve and save him, and yet how anxious she had been to do so.

The unopened package of his father would tell him only she had done so, and upon this

night one year after the death of Lafitte, he would solve the mystery.

He would learn the secret of the past.

His hand was upon the package, to break the seal, when the deep boom of a gun fell upon his ears.

Then there came other thundering reports in quick succession, and Officer Lester called down the companionway, as Leo sprung to his feet.

"There is a sea combat going on, sir, two leagues away."

"Ay, ay, Lester, I am coming," was the response.

Hastily gathering up the papers, along with the sealed package left by Lafitte, Leo returned them to the locker and went on deck.

The thunder of the guns was now incessant, and told of a hot fight for mastery.

Upon reaching the deck Leo turned his glass upon the scene, where a red glare illumined the sea.

Far off over the dark waters he beheld two vessels engaged in action.

One was a sloop-of-war, and the other was a brig.

There was a disparity in tonnage, guns and crew of the two vessels and the battle could end but one way, the capture of the brig.

But the captain of the smaller vessel was not going to strike his colors without a bold fight for it.

If he had to surrender, it would only be after he had severely punished his enemy.

The night was dark, the sea quiet, and a seven-knot breeze was blowing.

The Golden Wings' course had been directly toward the scene of conflict when the flashing guns revealed their position.

"Crowd on all sail, Senor Lester, for I recognize the American flag on that brig," said Leo.

"Yes, sir, and her foe is a British sloop-of-war," answered Lester.

"True, and must not capture her."

"Would you interfere, sir?"

"Certainly."

"A Carthaginian making war on England?" and Lester smiled.

"This craft is the Golden Wings, Senor Lester, and to-night must fight under her old colors, so run the gold-winged flag up, and we'll strike another blow for dear old America."

Lester was delighted at this, being an American himself, while for the rest of the crew they were willing to fight anything their young captain wished them to, independent of what flags they carried.

The night was very dark, as I have said, for clouds obscured the starlight, and it was on this account that the American brig-of-war had run so close upon the British vessel before she was seen.

When the sloop was discovered, the brig's commander ordered her hastily put away; but too late, for she had already been sighted by the Englishman.

The American therefore had only to prepare for action and make as good a fight as was possible.

Upon the deck of the brig, at the first call of danger, came an officer from the cabin whom the leader will recognize as Captain De La Tour.

His brow was clouded when he saw the peril his vessel was in, and yet so dark was the night he could not blame the lookout, as the Englishman had shown no lights until the *Nemesis* was sighted.

Turning to his first lieutenant, Captain De La Tour said curtly:

"Well, Dana, we are in for it, and if we are sunk, or captured, we have only to blame that accursed young corsair, Lafitte, for I only cruised down here because I felt sure the vessel reported so like the Golden Wings was his craft, and that he had transferred his piracies to these waters."

"Well, sir, by a running fight we may be able to outfoot the sloop," said Lieutenant Dana.

"I only hope so—now let us open the fight," and the men having gone quickly to quarters, the brig opened fire upon her large foe.

The *Nemesis*, when the sloop-of-war was discovered, had at once stood away in flight, and the Englishman began pursuit, and following the first shot from the brig the battle began in deadly earnest.

But finding that the raking fire of the Englishman was most severe, Captain De La Tour turned at bay, and not half a mile apart a fierce duel was begun between the plucky American and his large foe.

That there was a chance for victory, Captain De La Tour did not believe; but he hoped that

he might cripple his enemy and thus escape, and to this end he determined to fight until the very last.

But the British sloop was not crippled, and the American brig suffered more and more under the heavy fire, until at last Captain De La Tour was about to give the order to haul down the colors, when suddenly out of the dense darkness to windward burst a line of flame, and there came the deep roar of a broadside which was poured into the Englishman with telling effect.

Help had come in the moment of despair—it was the Golden Wings to the rescue!

CHAPTER XXV.

THE VESSEL THAT STRUCK HER FLAG.

THE sudden broadside from the Golden Wings, poured in upon the Englishman from the darkness to windward, was as much a surprise to the commander and crew of the sloop-of-war as to those on the American.

The Englishmen were just congratulating themselves upon a victory won, even though over a smaller foe, when into their midst tore the iron hail from the schooner.

And the broadside was delivered with terrible effect.

The flashing guns revealed to all eyes a small schooner, and then came darkness for a moment.

But once more the sea was illumined, and another broadside was sent into the sloop.

The result was almost a panic, caught as the British were between two fires.

But the gallant commander of the sloop soon restored order, and prepared to fight his new foe.

The coming of the Golden Wings gave courage to the brig's crew, and while cheers rung out from the American tars, they renewed the combat with hope of victory, for all recognized the schooner now and knew that she had come to their rescue.

The men of the brig did not feel toward Leo Lafitte as did their captain, and they were sure that he would be able to beat off the Englishman.

So was the fight renewed, and the English commander found himself between two fires, and so swiftly did the Golden Wings maneuver, so deadly was her fire, that it seemed that, powerful as she was, the sloop would not be able to win the victory.

Captain De La Tour was amazed.

The vessel he was looking for came suddenly before him, not to do him harm but to aid him.

There was no mistaking the craft—it was the Golden Wings, for the fire of her guns lighted up her strange flag.

That she had come to his rescue there was also no doubt.

Leo Lafitte, whose father he had hunted down, and to whom he had been merciless, was there to save his vessel from capture.

The splendid handling of the schooner won the admiration of Captain De La Tour, while the reckless daring of the young Corsair made him feel that he had been wrong in his pursuit of him.

Seeing that the brig was badly crippled, Leo had thrown his schooner into a position to do the sloop the most damage possible and prevent her from firing upon the American any more than an occasional shot.

The fire of the Golden Wings was wonderfully rapid, not a shot was thrown away, and, as the brig also began to deliver a telling fire upon the sloop, the Englishmen felt that the battle was going against them.

Either one would have been an easy conquest, they thought, but both together they were a match for their powerful foe.

Suddenly the brig almost ceased firing, and Leo felt that something was wrong.

The Englishmen observed it and cheered loudly, and Leo feared that the sloop would win after all, for alone his schooner would be no match for the sloop.

But he was determined to make a desperate effort to win, and sailing down between the sloop and the brig, while his port gun kept up a hot fire, he hailed:

"Ho, the Nemesis!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Don't give up, for the battle is almost won."

"Ay, ay, sir, we will renew the combat at once," came the reply of Lieutenant Dana, and, as the Golden Wings swept by, the brig poured in a broadside upon the sloop.

Then again the fight waged with fearful fury, and the thunder of the guns was appalling.

Nearer and nearer the Golden Wings drew to

the Englishman, and those on the brig seemed amazed at the boldness of the young corsair, for they could see that he meant to board.

And board the Golden Wings did, to the surprise of the British, who in vain tried to beat them back.

Seeing that Leo had gained a foothold upon the sloop, the brig's commander ran down near, lowering his boats and throwing his men into them as he did so, and in a short while more half a hundred American tars clambered up the side of the English vessel and joined side by side with the Golden Wings in the hand-to-hand fight upon the decks.

The British had already been forced back by the fierce onslaught of Leo and his men, and the coming of the Americans told them that they were beaten, and upon their own deck.

Resistance further was useless, and the order was reluctantly given to haul down the flag.

It was done, and the Golden Wings had snatched a victory out of the jaws of defeat.

"You have saved us, sir, and the sloop is your prize," and the lieutenant stepped forward and grasped the hand of Leo Lafitte.

"I am glad to have served you, sir, for I am an American; but I am not at war with Great Britain, so the sloop is your prize, not mine; but I fear your commander was slain?"

"He is severely wounded, sir, and it was when he fell that the crew were momentarily upset, but your hail gave them courage again."

"You are a remarkable man, Captain Lafitte, and have a splendid boat and superb crew."

"But Captain De La Tour wishes to see you."

"I will go on board the brig, sir, and leave you to take charge of the prize," and Leo got into one of the brig's boats and rowed to that craft to see Captain De La Tour, who had, when the firing ceased, at once had an officer hail the deck of the Englishman and request the young corsair to visit him.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE GUEST OF A CORSAIR.

WHEN Leo Lafitte entered the cabin of the Nemesis he found Captain De La Tour lying there on a cot, seriously wounded, for his left arm had just been amputated by the surgeon of the brig.

A cigar was between the teeth of the plucky commander, to keep back the groans that anguish would force from his lips; but he was doing well, the surgeon said, and would come around all right, for the wound had been dressed and no serious results were feared.

"You are Captain Lafitte, I believe, sir?" said Captain De La Tour, gazing into the handsome face of the young corsair.

"I am Leo Lafitte, sir, a son of Lafitte, the pirate," was the reply.

"I owe you my vessel, for you saved it by your noble conduct."

"I saw by the guns' flashes that an American brig was pluckily fighting a British sloop, and so came to your aid, for I am an American, or claim to be, for I was born at sea."

"This act will certainly get you a pardon from the United States."

"Captain De La Tour, I ask no pardon, for I hold one, and have intentionally done no wrong since I received it."

"I beat your vessel off, true, but I would not yield my prize or my schooner to you, and the result showed I was right, for I was sentenced to be hanged as it was."

"I am, and have been since my escape from the yard-arm of your vessel, in the service of the Carthaginians, and, as I had no right to use their ensign in a combat to save your brig, I hoisted my Golden Wings flag and fought the British sloop under it."

"The prize is yours, and I shall now go my way and hoist my rightful colors once more; only I ask that you keep secret the fact that a Carthaginian vessel saved you."

"Gladly will I do so, Captain Lafitte, and I appreciate all that you have done, and the Government shall know of your act as the Creole Corsair, not as a Carthaginian cruiser, and you will have full pardon for having beaten me off as you gallantly did, and I hope will return to America."

"I confess to having hounded you down, but, young sir, it was for a reason of which you know nothing; but I have no right to visit the sins of the father upon the son, so here is my hand, the only one I have, and I offer it in friendship," and Captain De La Tour smiled sadly as he glanced at the bandaged stump of his left arm.

"Now, sir," said Leo, "may I ask your wishes regarding the prize, for you are in dangerous waters here, near Jamaica."

"True; and, wounded as I am, I think I would the more rapidly recover could I visit an old friend, a Spanish exile who dwells upon the coast of Jamaica, but I suppose it cannot be."

"If you wish, sir, I could take you there in my schooner, while your brig and her prize the sloop go on to New Orleans."

"My Carthaginian flag, you know, can enter the ports of the English islands here, and I could land you at the home of your friend and come for you when you are able to leave, for I cruise when and where I please."

"You are very kind, Captain Lafitte, and I am tempted to accept your offer."

"I have been run down of late in health, and was thinking of secretly visiting my old Spanish friend, who wrote me to do so, as he had important matters to discuss with me."

"Of course, as we are at war with England, I could only visit him in secret, not as an American."

"I will ask my surgeon what he thinks."

The surgeon was sent for, and gave it as his opinion, if Captain De La Tour was willing to take the risk it would benefit him greatly to have a rest ashore at the magnificent villa of the old Spanish exile.

"Then I will accept your offer, Captain Lafitte, and let Lieutenant Dana go to New Orleans with the brig and her prize, and make a full report of your noble act."

"But, do you know that your face fairly haunts me, Captain Lafitte, with its reminder of the past, and I do not refer wholly to your likeness to your father, which is most striking, but a likeness to another."

"I cannot solve the mystery of the resemblance, sir," and Captain De La Tour passed his hand wearily across his face as though to shut out some haunting memory.

Leo then left the brig to get his schooner in order, for she had suffered under the sloop's fire, and he had lost heavily in his crew.

The prisoners were already secured on the sloop, excepting the officers, who had given their paroles not to attempt to retake their vessel, or an escape, and Lieutenant Dana had placed a prize crew on board.

With the losses the brig had sustained, and having to divide her crew with the sloop, it left but a small force on either craft, so that it was necessary to run for port with all haste and avoid meeting any British cruiser, to which they might fall an easy prey.

By sunrise the repairs were made, and all three vessels were once more in ship-shape, and ready to sail.

Captain De La Tour, wholly useless with his wounds, for he had been twice wounded, left Lieutenant Dana in command, and to make all reports, letting him into the secret, however, that he was to report that the Creole Corsair, Golden Wings, had come to their rescue, and not a Carthaginian corsair.

So the three vessels parted company, the sloop and brig standing away for New Orleans, the former with the Stars and Stripes floating over her decks.*

The Golden Wings, with Captain De La Tour a guest in her cabin, sped away for the coast of Jamaica, once more flying the Carthaginian flag.

CHAPTER XXVII.

STRANGELY MET.

CAPTAIN DE LA TOUR told Leo just how to head, to find the harbor near the home of Don Marco Mateo, the Spanish exile who had found an abiding-place on the coast of the island of Jamaica.

"I know the place, master," said Coola, who heard the words of the American officer.

"Ah, yes, my slave knows the home of Don Mateo, Senor Captain, and how to run in to an anchorage," said Leo.

Under the pilotage of Coola the schooner ran into the little haven, soon after nightfall, and dropped anchor.

Coola had told Leo that the villa had been the home of his mother, and it had been from that very little bay that Ricardo had carried her off, when she had been rescued by his father.

It had been from that home she had fled with Lafitte to become his wife, and the young rover was not anxious to visit the scenes of his mother's girlhood.

Don Marco Mateo, the Spanish exile, he knew

* In those days, when there were no steam-vessels, no telegraphs, news traveled slowly, and even after the declaration of peace between the United States and England, a number of vessels were taken by either side and severe naval fights occurred.—THE AUTHOR.

was his grandfather, and Leo wished to see him to know how he regarded his mother.

So he landed with Coola and walked up the steep path to the grounds above on the cliff.

Coola told him of his mother's flight with his father, and how bravely Lafitte had fought for his wife; but the slave did not tell all, for there were other things that he might have made known yet did not, as he was aware that Leo had never opened the package left him by his father.

Don Mateo was seated in his luxuriously-furnished library when a servant announced Leo, as an officer in naval uniform.

"His name, Ponto?"

"He gave no name, senor."

"Admit him."

Don Mateo was a man of three-score years, and his once black hair had turned snow-white.

He had the look of one who had known much sorrow, and was willing that the end should come.

"Senor, I am glad to welcome you."

"Be seated, please, and say how I can serve you," he said in a courtly way.

"Don Mateo, I have put into your harbor to bring a friend of yours, who is now on board my vessel and seriously wounded."

"I refer to Captain De La Tour," and Leo gazed with the deepest interest into the face of the Spaniard.

"Ha! De La Tour! He has come at last!"

"How glad I am, for he comes to find me yet living; but you say that he is wounded?"

"Yes, senor, he was wounded during an action his vessel had with a British vessel, and I brought him here and came on to advise you of his coming."

"I will at once send my servants for him."

"No, senor, my men can bring him, and, as he is in citizens' dress, it will not compromise you, though it is best to keep his coming a secret."

"True, senor, though peace has been declared between America and Great Britain."

"Ah! this is news, indeed."

"The tidings came to-day; but, senor, pardon me for so staring into your face, for it recalls to me features which I can never efface from my memory."

"I believe you have not told me your name."

"Leo Lafitte, senor."

"Lafitte? *Maldito!*" and the eyes of the old Spaniard flashed.

"Do you know, senor, why that name recalls to me bitter memories?"

"How should I know, senor?"

"One of that name—Lafitte, the Pirate of the Gulf—took from me my only child, my beautiful Juquita."

"It was more than a score of years ago, senor, but the memory of that sorrow is here to-day as though I had lost her but yesterday."

"I idolized her, and I forgave her, senor; and yet, death took her from Lafitte, from me, so that she could never return."

"Oh, senor, how strangely alike my poor Juquita you are, or is it because your name is Lafitte that I fancy I see a resemblance?"

"No, Don Mateo, my mother was Senorita Juquita Mateo—my father was Lafitte, the Pirate of the Gulf," said Leo, calmly.

The old exile started, a cry broke from his lips, and he sunk back in his chair, while he said eagerly:

"Tell me what you know of your mother?"

"I know that she was rescued from Ricardo the Rover by my father, Lafitte."

"I know that she loved Lafitte, believing him to be a Mexican officer, and that he told her who he was and she still loved him."

"I know that she fled with him, became his wife, and died soon after I was born at sea."

"Lafitte, my father, is dead; and dying, he left me the story of his life, which I have not yet had the courage to read."

"What I know I learned from my father's faithful friend and slave, who is now to me all that he was to Lafitte."

"I, senor, am now in the Carthaginian service, and Captain De La Tour, who was my father's foe, and mine, is now my friend."

"As for Ricardo, I hunted him down and avenged my father and my mother by putting him to death."

"Born upon a pirate vessel at sea, reared under the black flag, I knew no other life, until at last I became convinced that I was committing crime in the career that was mine, and I have since tried to blot out the past and win fame under an honorable flag."

The exile listened to the words of Leo with breathless eagerness.

Then he arose and approached him,

Laying a hand upon each shoulder he said:

"My son, in your face I see that of my lost child, your mother."

"I am an old man, tottering into the grave, and having forgiven your mother, I forgive you."

"Come, be my son, leave the sea, and bless by your presence my declining years."

"Will you, my son?"

"I will do all that you ask me when I have given up my position in the Carthaginian Navy," was the reply.

"Thank God! Now go and let De La Tour be brought here."

"Then sail to Carthage, resign your command, and come back to me as my son."

"Shall I so hope that you will?"

"Yes, senor; gladly will I do so."

An hour after, Captain De La Tour lay in one of Don Mateo's most comfortable rooms, with the now happy old Spaniard by his side, while the Golden Wings was flying over the sea toward Carthage.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LAFITTE'S LETTER.

ONCE the Golden Wings had set sail from the little harbor, Leo Lafitte entered his cabin and sat down to read the letter which his father had written him.

It was dated at sea, on board the schooner Destiny, and was as follows:

"MY LOVED SON:—It is no easy task for a father to lay bare a guilty heart to a son; but I know that when you read these lines I will have passed into the land beyond Death and feel that you will not condemn me as others have."

"I was born of good parents, who were wealthy, and our home was upon the coast."

"My mother died when I was only a few years old, leaving myself and a younger brother to the care of our father."

"My father was a stern, cold man toward me, yet ever gentle and loving to my brother, who reminded him of his wife, while I, it was said, was the image of a twin brother that my father hated."

"I loved my brother devotedly, until one day a shadow came between us."

"It came in the shape of rivalry in love, for my father became the guardian of a niece, his sister's child, and she was brought to our home to live."

"She was beautiful, and is still, for you know her as Mercedes the Nun."

"I loved her from the first, as did also my brother; but I felt that she loved me in return, and in fact she was soon pledged, young as we were, to become my wife."

"One day I left home for a few weeks, to attend to some business for my father, and when I returned I was met by an old slave who told me I was not expected so soon, and that my brother was to be married that night to Mercedes, who had consented to wed him."

"My son, Mercedes was my idol, and it drove me mad to hear this, and I sent the slave in to ask my brother to come out of the mansion to see a visitor."

"He came, and I threw his perfidy into his face, and then, in my madness, drove my knife into his bosom."

"He fell, as I supposed, dead, and I fled, going to sea in my little yacht."

"It matters not what I did, so that I tell you that I drifted about the world until I became a slaver, then a pirate."

"For a long time I believed my brother dead, and I learned to the contrary only after I had again wronged him."

"I learned that my father, wielding a great influence over him, had urged him to marry Mercedes, and that she had been made to consent, believing that I had deserted her, as she was told I had."

"My brother recovered from his wound, to find that Mercedes refused to marry him, and he entered the United States Navy."

"My father lived but a few years longer, and dying, left all of his vast property to my brother."

"After my father's death Mercedes entered a convent, taking the veil as a nun, and a strange fate led me to that sacred abode where she dwelt."

"But to my brother."

"He saved the life of a Spanish Don and his daughter, dwelling upon the coast of Jamaica, and loving the beautiful girl, became engaged to her."

"That same maiden I saved from Ricardo, loved her, not as I had Mercedes, yet loved her dearly, as she did me."

"I knew not that she was betrothed to my brother, and one night he arrived, denounced me as Lafitte, not knowing me to be his brother, and I fled, taking with me the maiden, who became your mother."

"Then it was that I knew how I had wronged my brother, and I, knowing him, though as Lafitte he knew me not, did not let you kill him when he sought my life the day of the battle and gave me a wound that so nearly proved fatal."

"Now, my son, you know the story of my life, and I would tell you that my name was Achille De La Tour, and my brother is Captain Henri De La Tour of the American Navy."

"Steer wide of his course, Leo my son, for he has since married, I learn, and though he has lost his wife, has a lovely child to love him."

"Should you meet him, tell him who you are, and tell him that I ask his forgiveness for the wrong I did him in the past, now knowing that it was our

father's act, not his, that was forcing him into a marriage with our cousin, Mercedes."

"With this confession, my son, I will end my letter to you, praying only for your happiness and prosperity in life."

"Your father."

"ACHILLE DE LA TOUR."

"P. S.—I send you within a paper telling you of your mother, and where dwells her father, the Spanish Exile."

"I also inclose other papers that may be of service to you, and a miniature of your mother."

Many times did Leo read this letter over, and then he said in a low, earnest voice:

"Captain De La Tour, not knowing Lafitte as his brother, had indeed come to hate him, and I wonder not now that his hatred fell upon me also."

"I have found in him an uncle, and this letter will prove it."

"He believed my father dead, for he told me he had had a brother who had committed a crime and put to sea in a little yacht, which had been lost in a storm that broke upon him."

"How strange all this is!"

"But I will return to Jamaica, place those papers in his hand, and then hoisting my Golden Wings flag over my schooner, will surrender it to him as an officer of the United States Government and take my chances."

CHAPTER XXIX.

CONCLUSION.

THE Golden Wings reached port in good time, and Leo resigned his commission in the Carthaginian Navy, against all entreaties to remain.

He had a large fortune coming to him, as prize money, and with this set sail again for Jamaica.

Paying his crew off, he went ashore, after dropping anchor in the little harbor near the exile's home, and was welcomed by Don Mateo, who was greatly improved in health, and by Captain De La Tour, whose wounds were almost healed.

Then, to the two, Leo read the confession of Lafitte, and most deeply was the American captain moved at the sad story of his brother Achille.

"Ah Leo, my son, happy indeed am I to know that I can atone to you for the past, for I was weak indeed to allow my father to urge me to wrong Achille, whom I most dearly loved."

"He was mad when he struck the blow at my heart, and I forgave him."

"In the tall, dark-faced, bearded man who stole from me Don Mateo's daughter I little dreamed of meeting my brother, whom I believed to be dead."

"No, I saw only Lafitte, the pirate, and it hurt me most deeply to feel that Juquita, your mother should become, as I believed his victim, and loving her as I did, I relentlessly pursued him, as you know, and sought, in a moment of madness, to take his life at New Orleans."

"Thank God I did not succeed, and now I gladly greet you as I would a son."

It was a glad moment for Leo, and he determined to make known a secret which only he and Sister Mercedes knew.

That secret was that he had rescued his little cousin, Captain De La Tour's daughter, from the kidnappers, that night upon the Mississippi.

"And you kept this to yourself, you noble fellow, while I was to hang you at the yard-arm of my vessel?"

"But there is no stain now upon you, and I will see that you receive full honor for your gallant deeds."

A week after the Golden Wings sailed away from the little harbor, bearing the exile and Captain De La Tour, the former going to find a home in America, where Leo had promised to dwell with him.

At the peak of the Golden Wings floated the Stars and Stripes, Leo's flag having been lowered forever.

In good time the beautiful schooner reached port, and was surrendered to the Government, while Leo, with the brand of corsair removed from his name, went to live with Don Mateo, and became a respected member of society, no one condemning him for having been a pirate against his will, when the story of his life was known.

Having ample money, from his Carthaginian cruises, for himself, Leo gave over to Sister Mercedes the gems left him by Lafitte, as a gift to the church.

A few years after he led to the altar Felicite, his little cousin, whom he had rescued from the kidnappers, and never did she have cause to regret that she had become the wife of one who was once known as the Creole Corsair.

THE END.

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